



INDIAN FARMERS' PROTEST HAS POWER TO BEAT MODI

MILITANT TRACTOR DEMONSTRATIONS PUT THE RIGHT ON THE DEFENSIVE >>PAGE 8



VACCINE WORKER EXPLAINS 'THIS IS HOW YEARS OF CUTS HINDER THE ROLLOUT'

EVIDENCE OF TOO FEW STAFF AND FAILED COMPUTER SYSTEMS >>PAGE 4

Socialist Worker

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BLAME TORIES FOR 100,000 COVID DEAD

THEIR PROFITS

OUR LIVES

WORKERS IN DANGER SPEAK OUT >>PAGES 2&3

ACTION

British Gas strike takes on 'fire and rehire' scandal

SOME 7,000 GMB union members working for British Gas struck from Monday in defence of their job conditions, pay, and other attacks from parent company Centrica.

Workers, including engineers, are staging their second walkout—seven days of strikes—over threats to sack them unless they sign worse contracts by 31 March.

>>Page 20

COVID-19



Why no vaccine for poor in Global South?

IT'S LIKELY those living in the world's poorest countries won't have access to the new Covid-19 vaccines for several years.

Rich countries have hoovered up almost all of the doses, leaving those in the Global South to die.

>Pages 10&11

UNITED STATES

Donald Trump—a postmortem

RACIST, SEXIST Donald Trump is finally gone from the White House.

He wasn't the outsider to the system he claimed to be.

Instead he was a product of a capitalist system in crisis.

Trump handed tax cuts to the rich and tried to balance the interests of his supporters with those of the establishment.

>>Pages 14&15

by SADIE ROBINSON

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAKS are hitting workplaces every day as the Tories' latest lockdown fails to keep working class people safe.

One worker at a Muller factory in Somerset has died after testing positive for Covid-19.

And some 47 others have tested positive, and 95 are self-isolating. Other workers say bosses have told them to keep coming to work.

Bristol council said that 19 workplaces in the city had coronavirus outbreaks as of 15 January. The figure is three more than the 16 recorded on 8 January.

The council have also stated that 28 percent and 18 percent of schools have seen Covid-19 outbreaks in the area.

Despite bosses' assurances that government pandemic guidelines were being met some 26 workers on a construction site at the Royal Liverpool Hospital have contracted the virus.

The Laing O'Rourke bosses confirmed that the project, employing around 1,000 staff, will still continue.

Pete is one of those workers who contracted the virus after working at the construction site.

"The site is working to Covid restrictions but the type of work I do makes it hard to social distance," he told Socialist Worker.

"I have to work with a colleague due to safety procedures. Also you are required to wear safety glasses with a mask, which means your visibility is restricted due to the glasses fogging up.

"There is obviously pressure on employees to travel to the site when required or you will receive no pay."

Risk

Hundreds of thousands of workers across Britain are being put at risk—and not because they grab a take-away coffee but because of dangerous workplaces they are forced in to.

Alistair, an electrician working at the Faslane submarine base in Scotland, told Socialist Worker that it's difficult to socially distance at work.

"They are making people have their lunch on site," he said. "We have ours in a portacabin with screens up, but you are back to back. "There is no proper social distancing at the canteen."

Alistair added that workers had walked off site the day before the latest lockdown began over the lack of social distancing—and were "laughed at". He said that bosses really haven't treated the virus as a major issue.

"On the first day back after Christmas you always get a return

WORKERS FORCED INTO WORKPLACES 'AFRAID TO SPEAK UP'

● Action now to close non-essential work and save lives

to work briefing," he said.

"There was not one mention of Covid-19. Supervisors are not doing anything to check people's mental health.

"They roll out a talk every now and then to tick a box, but when you raise a concern it's the old, 'You know where the gate is' routine.

In London, ongoing building work is one of the factors causing regular overcrowding in Tube stations.

Piotr, who works on a major construction project in the capital, told Socialist Worker the commute is "one of the things that worries me most".

"When I arrive in the morning, the underground station is very crowded," he said. "It's impossible not to be close to other people. I feel the station is a place that the virus spreads, but I can't avoid it."

The work itself makes it hard to stick to safety measures too. "There are all the safety notices and instructions on the site," said Piotr. "They fulfil everything they are supposed to, I'm sure.

"But when you are building it is very hard not to be close to other people.

"You need sometimes two or three people to do a job, or you need to be close enough to hear instructions."

Health

Bosses are aware that work is currently scarce and many workers feel they have no choice but to keep going to work despite the health risks.

"We are all going to work because we have to or we will not be paid," said Piotr.

"I like to work. But if it was possible not to work and have money, I would rather be safe."

Alistair said temporary contracts also make it harder to raise safety issues.

"Even though we are full-time employees, they only offer three-month contracts at a time," he explained. "This stops any industrial action or people saying anything."

Construction workers aren't the only ones being put at risk.

Louise, a family support worker, said that her bosses expect staff to continue home visits despite a ban on household mixing.

"We could see families via Zoom or ring them, but they want us to

see them face to face," Louise told Socialist Worker. "Managers and fat cats are sitting pretty, not visiting families like us minions."

Hospital

Vincent works in London, helping with the process of recruiting hospital staff.

He said his work could be done at home—but he and others have been told that they have to be in the office.

"I was really annoyed," he told Socialist Worker. "I think it's ridiculous that I still have to go into work. I raised working from home with my manager and she said no, I would rather have you in the office.

"I felt like I had no choice but to go in."

Workers are left worrying that they may contract or spread the virus.

"I'm very careful, but I also think everyone's at risk really," said Vincent.

Louise said workers feel "unheard, not listened to, stressed, frustrated, pressurised, underpaid and like a statistic".

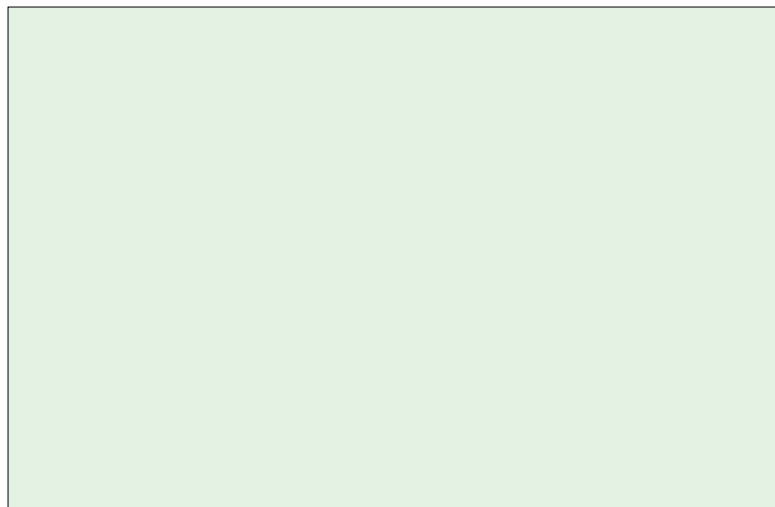
"This is resulting in headaches, disturbed sleep, lack of appetite and tension and irritability at home," she said.

"We also have physical symptoms of anxiety like nausea, panic attacks, depression, stress and cold sores.

"We deal with vulnerable people's mental health and emotional wellbeing, and we're supposed to be

Commuting is dangerous

“I felt like I had no choice but to go in to work, even though I wanted to work from home



positive and upbeat. So we feel like we're not giving our best to them as well."

Vincent said he thinks other workers have been "afraid to speak up" about the health risks of being forced into work. "They might lose their job, or might not know how to go about asking to work from home," he said.

Pete said he has worked in four different countries since last March and feels that Britain is worse in terms of protecting workers' safety.

"When I arrived on site after working in Germany, I was allowed back without any questionnaire about my recent activities," he said.

"England has not dealt with the pandemic well. Personally I think

the government reacted too slowly with lockdown and it didn't go far enough."

Have you been pressured to go into non-essential work? Do you feel unsafe at work? Send your story to reports@socialistworker.co.uk or phone 020 7840 5656

NEW ROYAL Liverpool hospital construction site (left) where 26 workers have tested positive for the coronavirus. Over 1,000 workers are still employed on the site

“For many workers travelling to work can be as hazardous as the work itself

500 cases at DVLA Swansea

By NICK CLARK

WORKERS ARE “scared” of catching Covid-19 in a major government office where more than 500 people have caught the virus thanks to uncaring bosses.

Bosses at a Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) office in Swansea have forced nearly 2,000 people to come into work in dangerous conditions.

Call centre workers say they've been made to sit just one metre apart, while managers dismiss and ignore their safety complaints.

One worker told the BBC, “There are certain elements within management who are trying to bend the rules and regulations.”

They said workers who have shown Covid-19 symptoms, or been in contact with someone with the virus, have still been made to come into work.

Paul Williams, group president of the Department for Transport section of the PCS union, has been speaking to workers in the office.

He told Socialist Worker, “They've got people sitting back-to-back in the contact centres.

“What's even worse is they're asking staff to bring their own face coverings—DVLA has refused to provide those for everyone.

“The cleaning regime isn't good enough. They're not socially distanced properly.

Paul added that it was possible for most of those made to come into the office to work from home—but management refused to allow it.

“It's not that the IT system doesn't work at home,” he said. “They won't trust staff to work at home because the system is linked to a police national computer.

“There's been no solution for almost a year. They've put some screens in but it's been spreading and spreading.”

Paul said the PCS would back all workers who want to take action over safety, including refusing to work under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act.

“Members should use Section 44 where they need to use it,” he said.

“As a union we'll back the members if they want to strike.”

The Tories put us in danger

THE TORIES keep saying people should work from home where possible.

But it's just empty words. There's nothing to stop bosses forcing workers to attend workplaces. And many employees are too fearful of losing pay or their job altogether to challenge them.

“I think the government should be a bit more strict about it,” said hospital staff recruiter Vincent. “I don't like them putting it as if it's an option.

“Rather than saying stay at home unless you really have to go to work, they should just say you should stay at home.”

Yet for the bosses and their Tory backers, profit comes before workers' safety.

Much so-called “essential” work could easily be delayed, except for the fact that it's essential for making money.

As construction worker Piotr said, “We are building flats. Does it really matter if they are completed six months later than they will be now?”

The TUC union federation has condemned the way so many workers' lives are being put at risk. But it hasn't called any action over the scandal. Nor have most other unions.



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NHS vaccine worker says, ‘years of cuts hinder the roll out’

by YURI PRASAD

BACK STORY

YEARS OF NHS cuts and Tory mismanagement of the pandemic are slowing down efforts to vaccinate people in one of the areas hardest hit by Covid-19.

That's what Susan, a vital health worker who is helping coordinate the vaccination programme in east London, told Socialist Worker.

“A doctor I've been working with broke down in tears last week,” says Susan. “She was just totally exhausted. The stress of trying to maintain a GP surgery, while also trying to administer a huge vaccination programme was just too much.

“There's no extra staff to run the vaccinations, and there's not even extra IT systems. For example, there's a real shortage of laptops, and many of the computers just don't talk to each other,” she said.

Susan described a battle health workers face to both deliver vaccinations, and the chaotic scenes in run-down surgeries where social distancing is very hard or impossible to maintain.

“We've got 48 hours from when the Pfizer vaccines arrive at the surgery to when they must be injected into patients' arms. So there's a huge pressure on turnaround.

Duplication

“Part of my job is to ring patients and make appointments for them, but often the computer systems don't work properly. So you have recorded things on paper, but you know that means duplication—and more dangerously, that people can end up getting missed.

Susan says that east London has been terribly affected by the second wave, with a very large number of deaths.

But she pointed out that the rollout of the programme in east London has been very uneven, with some boroughs performing better than others.

“Waltham Forest is not doing so well,” she said. “But it's not difficult to see why. It has one of the worst ratios of numbers of patients per

The vaccine roll out has so far seen millions of people “at high risk” inoculated. But it's the efforts of health workers, rather than the government, that's made it happen

●Workers report failing computer systems, buildings too small for social distancing and far too few staff

●Doctors are trying to run huge vaccination programme while maintaining their GP practices. Many staff are working weekends and days off

GP of anywhere in Britain. That's a long term problem that we are now paying for.

“People in the NHS are so committed to this though, it's incredible. We've got people working their days off and weekends to get this done. Everyone is desperate to save lives.”

But Susan says stretching the NHS will come at a price. Many clinical staff are being moved from services which already have extremely long waiting times onto the vaccination programme.

The result will be that those services will now be even more over-stretched and patient care will suffer.

“What makes me really angry,” says Susan. “Is that we could have prepared for this in the summer.

“The government should have run a massive training programme for people willing to be vaccinators. There are millions of people who would have helped.

“We could have planned the IT that we knew we'd need. But the Tories blew that chance, just like they have messed up everything else.”

AN NHS worker administers a vaccine

Coronavirus statistics show the lowest paid are more likely to die

PEOPLE THAT work in some of the lowest-paid jobs are at the highest risk of dying from coronavirus, the latest analysis from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) indicates.

The research looked at 7,961 deaths involving Covid-19 among those aged 20-64 years old between 9 March and 28 December 2020.

It found workers in “elementary occupations” or caring, leisure and other service occupations were dying at a faster rate than other types of workers.

These categories include workers in manufacturing, retail staff, social workers, security guards, care workers and home carers.

The next most deadly occupations were chefs, taxi drivers, bus drivers, basic construction, food workers and local government admin workers.

It's a description of the jobs that millions of working class people do, often for very low pay.

Men were found to be dying at a rate of 31.4 deaths per 100,000,

while deaths of working age women stood at 16.8 per 100,000.

Managers, directors and senior officials were among the groups least likely to die of the virus.

Ben Humberstone, head of Health Analysis and Life Events at the ONS said, “Today's analysis shows that jobs with regular exposure to Covid-19 and those working in close proximity to others continue to have higher Covid-19 death rates when compared with the rest of the working age population.

“As the pandemic has progressed, we have learnt more about the disease and the communities it impacts most.

“There is a complex combination of factors that influence the risk of death—from your age and ethnicity, where you live and who you live with, to pre-existing health conditions.”

The slaughter of thousands of low paid workers wasn't inevitable. Many were driven to their deaths because bosses and Tories wanted them back into dangerous workplaces.

It's no surprise that bosses

and the highest paid have been able to keep themselves safe throughout the pandemic.

And those delivering critical services and helping some of the most vulnerable in society, such as working in care homes, or home carers, are some of the most at risk.

The latest death statistics show the brutal reality of a society run for what is profitable for the bosses.

500 People Before Profit activists plan more action

WELL over 500 people joined a People Before Profit (PBP) national activists' meeting on Sunday on the theme of “Fighting for safety, jobs and survival”.

Andrene Williams, part of the strike by workers in the UVW union at the Sage care home in north London, spoke at the event.

Andrene said strikers were “so determined and so strong” in the battle for “dignity, respect and equality”.

She described how a small group of workers had begun to organise over pay and conditions. This led to wider union recruitment and a recent three-day strike.

Over 450 people joined workshops on fighting redundancies, resisting austerity, opposing scapegoating, fighting for climate jobs, defending education, safety at work and campaigning for welfare and housing.

In the safety at work workshop, teacher Emma described how school workers had mobilised to pressure the government into closing schools to most children at the beginning of the year.

They had done this by using Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 to refuse to work.

She said the experience showed “the importance of union workplace organising and the important role

of socialists and activists”.

She argued that “other workers need to use Section 44”.

At a session that brought together all participants, Howard Beckett, assistant general secretary of the Unite union, denounced the government that “expected people to work through the pandemic but at the end will expect these same people to pay with their wages, jobs and conditions”.

He said that “wealth must pay for the crisis”.

Class

John McDonnell MP attacked a “class government that is putting profits first”. PBP brings together strikers, worker activists, campaigners, MPs and trade union officials.

It puts forward a radical alternative to the government's reckless, profit-first mishandling of the virus. And it demands protection for workers' livelihoods and opposes austerity.

PBP also highlights the importance of struggle to win such demands and the centrality of solidarity with people fighting back.

Proposals that came from the meeting include

●A day of action against the cuts in Universal Credit on 6 February.

●A day of action on budget day, 3 March.

●Support for anti-racist initiatives such as the Stand Up To Racism demonstrations on 20 March.

The meeting ended with the sharing of details of all present strikes and encouragement to give them solidarity.

It is this action that will be crucial in piling pressure on the Tories and encouraging workers to take up the fight themselves.

Go to PBP Facebook page bit.ly/PBPfacebook

Socialist Worker
WHAT WE THINK

JOBS SLAUGHTER SHOWS CHAOS OF CAPITALISM

UNEMPLOYMENT figures on Tuesday showed the continuing jobs slaughter. Those aged 25 to 34 face the biggest risk of losing their jobs.

In the three months to November, people in that age group had a redundancy rate of 16.2 per 1,000—a fivefold increase on the same period a year earlier.

Overall some 1.72 million were officially jobless, the highest level in five years. And this is while the furlough scheme is still in place.

This is how capitalism works—profits first, workers on the scapheap.

Look at retail. Firms gobble up their failing competitors to seize cheap assets. Topshop—previously owned by tax-avoider Philip Green—is expected to be bought by online fashion retailer Asos.

Chain

And online retailer Boohoo has bought department store chain Debenhams.

Boohoo is the company whose supplier paid its workers,—forced to work in dangerous conditions at a Leicester factory—as little as £3.50 an hour.

The doors of Debenhams' 124

remaining high street stores will be permanently shut at the cost of 12,000 jobs. And 13,000 jobs at Topshop are set to be cut. Shares in Asos rose by almost 6 percent after it began talks to take over the firm.

In Edinburgh, department store Jenners is set to close at the cost of 200 jobs

Fraser Group, owned by Sports Direct billionaire Mike Ashley, operated the department store under its House of Fraser chain.

Sports Direct bought House of Fraser out of administration in 2018, and has closed 14 of its 59 stores.

Jenners' closure comes after a tenancy dispute with the site's

“Firms taking over other companies leads to a concentration of enormous wealth

Oxfam added, “At the same time, the pandemic has ushered in the worst job crisis in over 90 years with hundreds of millions of people now underemployed or out of work.”

But the system does not respond to moral calls.

Workers need to fight for every job. Every struggle is important and encourages others to fight.

But there needs also to be a reckoning with the whole system that will always put profits first.

LABOUR IS EMBARRASSING

LABOUR'S leaders see their party members as an embarrassment—and now want to be able to block them from standing as candidates in elections.

Under new proposals the party's top bureaucrat David Evans will get powers to veto any candidate he or leader Keir Starmer doesn't like.

Unselected officials will also screen every candidate chosen by members and block any who “can be seen as embarrassing.”

So you might want to stand as a council candidate who says they won't vote for cuts.

Or you might want to be an MP who challenges the Tories rather than support them in “constructive” opposition.

Maybe you've been a strong, vocal critic of Israel, you don't support bombing other countries, or you're not so keen to wave the Union Jack.

Chances are Starmer's machine thinks you're an embarrassment, and you won't be allowed to stand.

Labour's leaders have always relied on its members to campaign for them—but they don't want their left wing views to “embarrass” them.

That's why party MPs have always had the power to ignore policy decisions made by members at conference.

The real embarrassment is the way Starmer insists on giving the Tories an easy ride, and begs for approval from the right wing press.

Why stick around to be embarrassed like that?

Breakfast in

Sign up to our morning newsletter Breakfast in Red and get the latest news every day.

For updates and analysis on the stories that matter go to socialistworker.co.uk/breakfastinred

ANALYSIS

ALEX CALLINICOS



Macron wages war at home and abroad

FRENCH PRESIDENT Emmanuel Macron said last week that France would offer “no repentance or apologies” for the colonisation of Algeria or the eight-year war it waged against Algerian independence, in which perhaps a million people died.

This decision no doubt is partly motivated by Macron’s bid for re-election in 2022. He will be running against strong opposition from his right, from Marine Le Pen of the fascist National Rally and the conservative Republicans.

But there’s more involved. Macron is waging an increasingly aggressive and militarised campaign of repression both within France and externally.

So defensive is he about these policies that when Mehreen Khan wrote a critical article in November, Macron forced the Financial Times newspaper to take it down and publish his reply.

But even the Financial Times drew the line at a new “global security law” that his government rushed through the French Parliament a few weeks later. An editorial denounced “Macron’s illiberal plan to protect the French police” by making it a crime to publicly identify any police officers.

This follows several years of violent police attacks on protests by the Gilets Jaunes (Yellow Vests), trade unionists, anti-racist activists and students. Hundreds of thousands demonstrated against the new law on 28 November.

One of its most sinister aspects is the encouragement it gives to greater domestic use of surveillance technologies such as drones, CCTV and facial recognition.

In an important article the French Marxist Claude Serfati writes, “The population living on the French territory and especially in the inner-city suburbs now finds itself facing a disquieting alliance between a highly experienced repressive bureaucratic apparatus and perfected surveillance technologies.”

But Serfati argues that these policies must be seen in the context of the broader strategy of French imperialism.

Françafrique

Unable to compete effectively in civilian industries with German or East Asian firms, French capitalism has tended for many decades to specialise in arms and aerospace. This has been accompanied by the projection of military power abroad, especially in so-called “Françafrique”, the informal empire president Charles de Gaulle and his adviser Jacques Foccart imposed on France’s African ex-colonies.

According to Serfati, successive French governments have doubled down on this strategy. This has left Germany economically dominant in the European Union and, with Brexit, France its biggest military power.

The spread of Islamist radicalism has been used to justify more military interventions, notably in Mali.

When Macron became president in 2017 he proclaimed the end of Françafrique. But today there are still 5,100 French troops in ten bases scattered across West and Central Africa. In his letter to the Financial Times, Macron boasts, “The French army shows exemplary courage in the Sahel and its action against terrorist groups benefits all of Europe.”

He goes on to say that “there are breeding grounds for terrorists in France”. Macron and his government have been, in effect, branding France’s Muslim population as the enemy within. But they are also targeting those protesting against economic policies that force working people to bear the costs of the pandemic. The national education minister linked the two, denouncing “Islamism-leftism”.

Serfati warns that the same military used in neocolonial interventions in Africa is increasingly being deployed to police the French population. Macron has used the Defence Council to co-ordinate the government response to the pandemic. He has also sought to project French power in the Mediterranean, in particular by backing the alliance of Greek, southern Cyprus, and Israel against Turkey.

But Macron runs the risk of being outflanked by Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Turkish intervention in Libya tipped the balance in favour of the UN-backed government in Tripoli, which France had been trying to overthrow. And Turkey is increasingly active in the rest of Africa, more than tripling the number of embassies and offering trade and aid. Macron’s pursuit of imperial grandeur faces internal resistance and external competition.



THE COLEHAM area of Shrewsbury on Monday—flooded after the River Severn burst its banks

PICTURE: DAVID SMITH

Cuts and Tory failures are to blame for new floods misery

by SOPHIE SQUIRE

FLOODS HAVE caused misery across many parts of Britain as hundreds of homes have been severely damaged or destroyed.

And the Environment Agency has said that thousands of flood defences are basically “useless”.

More than one in 20 of Britain’s crucial flood defences were in disrepair in 2019-20, the highest proportion in years.

In the regions battered by Storm Christoph last week, this rose to nearly one in ten.

The storm resulted in heavy rainfall that saw rivers burst their banks. In North Yorkshire the average amount of rainfall for January was recorded in just two days.

Flood warnings were, as of Monday, still in place in over 30 locations across Britain.

Evacuated

Thousands of people were evacuated in the Greater Manchester area last Thursday after river levels rose to an alarming height.

In Skewen, South Wales, 80 people were evacuated from their homes on Friday due to a “flooding incident”.

A severe weather warning was issued across the West Midlands on Sunday. And floods closed 14 roads in Nottinghamshire. The

river Severn burst its banks at a number of different locations. It flooded many riverside homes in Bewdley near Kidderminster.

Flood defences reportedly failed leading to what some residents described as a “tidal wave” of water heading towards their homes.

This is the second time in two years that the river has burst its banks.

Bewdley resident Dan Madden said, “I’m gutted to be honest.

“It’s took me years and years to buy a house and I

Boris Johnson visited flood-hit Bewdley in March last year

Vaccine rollout delayed

THE government’s failure to adequately prepare for flooding is leading to delays in distribution of the Covid-19 vaccine.

Snowy weather and flooding has hampered the rollout of the coronavirus vaccine in Derbyshire.

A number of GP practices across the region had to close their doors for vaccination due to adverse weather conditions.

A testing centre in Sheffield was forced to close due to flooding fears after the river Don burst its banks.

Mark Pritchard

And in Wrexham, north Wales, emergency teams were called to protect a warehouse filled with the Oxford-AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine.

Mark Pritchard, leader of Wrexham Council, said flood damage to the warehouse “could have had an impact not just in Wrexham or Wales but across the whole country”.

buy one in the town I love and it’s flooded twice in two years.”

Shrewsbury in the West Midlands was also hit hard by the flooding. Shrewsbury resident Lani told Socialist Worker that it was “devastating to see flooding again”.

“People are only just recovering from last year’s floods, businesses are still renovating,” she said.

Defences

“You’d expect flood defences to be better after last year but they aren’t.”

Boris Johnson visited the town when it flooded last year. He said that new permanent defences would be put in place.

But Lani said many people saw his visit as a publicity stunt. “We know the flood defence budget has been cut,” she said. “Boris only came here for the pictures.”

People are bracing for yet more flooding as more snow is forecast to fall this week.

Climate change means extreme weather events such as flooding become more common.

And while the Tories continue to make empty promises about providing better defences, many people face repeated flood devastation.



Got a story?

Email ideas to reports@socialistworker.co.uk

Cop to face probe over the death of Kevin Clarke

A new disciplinary hearing is set to go ahead over the death in London, while campaigners in Cardiff keep fighting for Mohamud Hassan

A SENIOR Met police officer who was cleared of misconduct over the death of Kevin Clarke is set to face new disciplinary.

The officer was told they had “no case to answer” last year over the death of Kevin—a black man experiencing mental distress.

But Kevin’s family were not told about the first hearing.

The officer has now agreed to have the original verdict quashed for fresh disciplinary proceedings, despite originally refusing.

Police watched Kevin suffer a mental health episode for 13 minutes on playing fields in Catford, south east London, in 2018. Up to seven police handcuffed and restrained him for 33 minutes.

A video shows he repeatedly told officers, “I can’t breathe.” He was taken to hospital and pronounced dead.

An inquest last October found that the restraint was inappropriate and contributed to his death.

Meanwhile more questions are being raised about the death of Mohamud Mohammed Hassan.

He was arrested following an alleged breach of the peace on Friday 9 January in Cardiff.

He was held overnight by the police and released the following day without charge.

Mohamud’s family and neighbours report seeing him bruised and cut, with blood on his clothes. He died later that night.

South Wales Police immediately denied any allegations of excessive force.

Injured

However, a post-mortem revealed Mohamud suffered many bruises on his arms and left hand. He also had an injured lip.

Anti-racist activist Lee Jasper, who is working with Hassan’s family, said, “The Coroner’s official briefing to the post-mortem pathologists stated that Mohamud had been arrested at a party and had

BACK STORY

Kevin Clarke died after contact with police in south east London in 2018

● An inquest jury last year found that the police’s inappropriate use of restraints on Clarke contributed to his death.

● Police surrounded him as he lay on the ground and pinned his arms behind his back.

● The jury said the restraint “probably more than minimally or trivially” contributed to his death

been consuming drink and drugs.

“Once again, we see an attempt to smear and repeat falsehoods to sway or unduly influence, not only the public but unbelievably the forensic pathologists responsible for identifying the cause of death.

“The critical question is where did the Coroner get this information?

“Mr Hassan’s legal team has written to the coroner demanding an explanation of how this erroneous information ended up in a critical briefing note to the pathologists.”

The family still haven’t received body cam footage of his arrest.

Justice

Protesters in Cardiff and London since Mohamud’s death have called for transparency.

Bianca Ali from Cardiff Black Lives Matter told Socialist Worker, “We want to be a part of the investigation”.

Police have since moved to fine several protesters, trying to block resistance.

But the fight for justice continues.

A survey by the charity Inquest found that Black people are twice as likely to die as white people in custody.

The use of force features in more than twice as many deaths of black people in custody than of others.



THE FAMILY of Kevin Clarke outside Southwark Coroner’s court in London last year

Majority of people not in favour of reduced immigration, says new poll

A NEW survey has exposed the lie that the Tories’ racist immigration controls have popular support.

Polling by Ipsos Mori shows that less than half of the public want to see a reduction in immigration.

The poll also shows that 12 percent of respondents would like to see an increase in immigration to Britain. This is a rise from 7 percent in February 2015 and 9 percent in August 2019.

Those wanting fewer immigrants has dropped from 67 percent in February 2015 to 49 percent.

The polling also shows increased sympathy with people attempting dangerous journeys to Britain. In August 2019, 53 percent of people said they had sympathy, rising to 56 percent at the end of 2020.

Dropped

The number saying they had little or no sympathy dropped from 43 percent to 39 percent. And 42 percent believe it is important to have an immigration system that is fair.

The survey shows that the drive for anti-immigration laws are not the result of demands from ordinary people, but are driven



Refugee Fouad Kakei was jailed

from the top. Stephen Hale, chief executive at Refugee Action, said, “This heart-warming poll confirms that more people than not want a Britain that welcomes and supports people fleeing violence and oppression.”

The Tory government has taken an increasingly hardline approach to people wanting to come to Britain—and punishing those who resist racism.

Home secretary Priti Patel has developed a network of temporary

accommodation to hold asylum seekers as they wait for a decision on their claims.

A mass of Covid-19 outbreaks has torn through detention centres and refugee camps.

Asylum seekers across Britain report that they have been warned not to “misbehave” or speak out about conditions. They say they are threatened with being added to a “blacklist” that will affect their claims.

Persecution

And an Iranian refugee fleeing persecution was jailed last week and faces deportation after piloting dinghies of refugees headed for Britain on two occasions in 2019.

Fouad Kakei piloted the boats because nobody else could, and he didn’t want anyone to die at sea.

Meanwhile, the Colston Four appeared in court on Monday. The four have been charged with criminal damage after a Black Lives Matter protest in Bristol last year.

Protesters tore down a statue of slave trader Edward Colston and threw it in the harbour. The four have pleaded not guilty. The case is set to resume on 8 February.



Militant farmers rage on the streets of India

by YURI PRASAD

HUNDREDS OF thousands of protesting farmers on tractors were fighting their way into the Indian capital New Delhi as Socialist Worker went to press on Tuesday.

Police blocked the main roads into the city with steel barricades flanked by water cannons, riot vans and masses of reinforcements.

But the farmers tore these aside like toys, with the media complaining that they were using their tractors “like tanks against the police”.

Having previously agreed with police that they would not enter the centre of Delhi, the farmers began storming the famous Red Fort in the heart of the old city.

The cops tried in vain to stop the farmers’ advance. They fired round after round of tear gas and charged at the protesters with their heavy “lathi” batons.

Yet the sheer number and militancy of the farmers saw the police retreat again and again. Politicians who had hoped today’s TV live feeds would be filled with bloodied protesters instead saw cops lying in the roads injured.

The protests came on Republic Day, a day to mark the founding of modern India. It usually features an endless parade of the military’s latest hardware, combined with some sabre-rattling against Pakistan, and more recently China.

But today is the farmers’ day—and it will be known as a day of defiance.

The hard right government of Narendra Modi rushed through a series of laws that aimed to “liberalise” the agricultural sector last year.

Every farmer knows that this will hand power to multinational agribusinesses and that the poorest will lose what little land they have.

Ministers calculated that farmers were capable of only limited resistance, and that they could do what they liked with their huge parliamentary majority.

BACK STORY

On Tuesday hundreds of thousands of farmers protested across India on the country’s Republic Day

● They are in revolt against hard right prime minister Narendra Modi’s plans that will plunge them into deep poverty

● In New Delhi police attempted to restrict the demonstrations

● But militant farmers on tractors broke through the police barriers and then repeatedly beat back the cops

Unfortunately for them, the farmers see the battle as one of life and death.

For more than two months they have been camped outside the capital in their thousands. But Tuesday’s protesters have turned the tables.

And the gesture could not be more apt. It was here in 1857 that forces against the British rallied during the great Indian Mutiny.

Elsewhere in India, farmers descended on many other cities including Mumbai. Even tribal farmers long excluded from India’s civil society joined the marches.

Janabai Laxman Mengar came from Akola, some 300 miles from Mumbai.

She packed bed sheets, chapattis and a change of clothes for her husband and herself.

“We had to come, missing the protest was not an option,” she said. “We brought food, and there are water tankers here. We slept here on the Maidan [protest site] last night.”

Looking at the hundreds of thousands that had joined her she added, “This struggle is nothing as compared to the fight ahead of us.”



On other pages...

So who was Trump really?
>>Pages 14&15

FARMERS ON tractors stormed India’s capital New Delhi on Tuesday

TUNISIA

The state ‘should fear hungry people’

by NICK CLARK

THOUSANDS OF people in Tunisia have defied a state crackdown to protest against unemployment and poverty.

Demonstrators marched on the capital city Tunis last Saturday, while young people clashed with police for the fifth night running in Tunisia’s poorest neighbourhoods and towns.

Protesters chanted, “The people want the downfall of the regime.” It was the slogan of the Tunisian revolution, which overthrew dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali ten years ago this month.

Release

They also called for an end to police violence and the release of young people arrested on the night time protests.

More than 1,000 people—many between the ages of 14 and 15—have been arrested in battles with riot cops.

Protesters are angry at high

unemployment—an issue at the heart of the revolution that began in 2010. Unemployment is at 15 percent in Tunisia—though that figure rises to 36 percent for 15-24 year olds.

Protester Oussama Mrasi told the Al Jazeera news network, “All the young men who marched the past few days must be released.

“This is our demand and we will not give up.

“They can say that they can suppress us with the police. But we are not afraid of the police or of the public prosecutor.”

Police and national guard soldiers have attacked protesters with tear gas, water cannon and armoured vehicles. Footage also shows cops dragging and beating people on the street.

Chabib, a 34 year old protester in the poor neighbourhood Ettadhamen, has been unemployed for years despite holding a computer network technician diploma.

“We are out on the streets because we want social justice and work,” he said. “Ten years

after the fall of Ben Ali, we are sick and tired of having to ask for the same basic things.”

In a speech last week prime minister Hashem Al-Mashishi said he was “well aware that there is anger and frustration”.

Voice

“Your voice is heard and your anger is legitimate,” he said.

Yet the government also banned protests under the guise of coronavirus restrictions.

But as protesters point out, many of the poorest people in Tunisia have paid the price for restrictions and loss of work without any support.

“If you lock us up at home, we can’t work and if we can’t work we can’t eat,” Chabib said. “The government said it would help us, but it was just empty promises. I can’t see a single glimmer of hope any more.

“The government doesn’t care about us. To them, it’s like we don’t exist. But I am warning them, the starving citizens are rising up, and they should fear hungry people.”

Racists relieved at pardon

ONE OF the last acts Donald Trump carried out as US president was to pardon his former chief strategist Steve Bannon.

Bannon was charged with conspiracy to commit fraud having allegedly siphoned off “hundreds of thousands of dollars” in “personal expenses”.

These personal expenses were put into the racist “We Build The Wall” fund.

Bannon’s pardon must come as a relief to his allies in the British government.

In 2018 Boris Johnson, Jacob Rees-Mogg and Michael Gove all met with Steve Bannon.

This was with the full knowledge that he was the guru of the so-called alt-right.

They knew that at a rally of the far right French party the National Front he said that to be called a racist was a “badge of honour.”

Bannon’s racist politics didn’t worry his Tory admirers.

Rees-Mogg called him an “interesting man” while Bannon insists he collaborated with Johnson on a number of projects.

Johnson, Rees-Mogg and Gove must be very happy that their racist friend Bannon has been pardoned.

The racism that Trump and his allies encouraged and endorsed will not disappear when he leaves the White House.

Its poison will remain—in Downing Street as much as in the US—and the fight against it needs to go on.

Sasha Simic
East London



ILLUSTRATION: TIM SANDERS

Tory MP should pay for his wealth having slavery roots

RICHARD DRAX, MP for South Dorset, is the richest parliamentarian in Britain.

He owns over 15,000 acres of land in Dorset as well as properties across the county.

His current wealth amounts to over £150 million.

Drax also owns a plantation in Barbados, the Drax Hall Estate, which has been in the hands of his family for more than 350 years.

Established to exploit slave labour in the production of sugar, it has delivered vast profits, enabling the Draxes to join England’s landed aristocracy.

The Caribbean Community’s Reparations Commission (CRC) describes Drax Hall Estate as a “killing field” and a “crime scene”.

Hilary Beckles, chair of the CRC, says, “The Drax family has done more harm and violence to the black people of Barbados than any other family.”

“The Draxes built and designed and structured slavery.”

The CRC is calling for acknowledgment and reparations for generations of exploitation and suffering experienced by African slaves and their descendants.

As a start, they are calling for the estate to be restored to the people of Barbados.

Stand Up To Racism Dorset has joined forces with activists in Barbados to back this call.

In an open letter to Richard Drax, we have written, “Your own wealth, Mr Drax, including your estate in Dorset today, is witness

to this legacy of the enslavement of Africans in the Caribbean.

“Black Lives Matter—then and now. The time to effect reparatory justice is now.”

The open letter has been signed by community organisations, trade unions and local elected bodies, as well as hundreds of people in Dorset.

Bridport Town Council has unanimously backed the letter, calling on Richard Drax to acknowledge and apologise for the historical role of his family in the transatlantic slave trade.

They have also backed the CRC in its struggle for justice.

Phil Marfleet

Stand Up to Racism Dorset

Sign the Open Letter at bit.ly/DraxLetter

Workers must use law to refuse work

SINCE LAST March, Socialist Worker has carried reports of trade unionists using section 44 of the 1996 Employment Rights Act to refuse to work because of Covid-19.

The NEU union’s advice, on 2 January, to teachers to use Section 44 to refuse to return after Christmas, is a historic breakthrough. It has taken a generation for Section 44 to achieve public prominence.

The “right not to suffer detriment in health and

safety cases” originated in the European health and safety Framework Directive of 1989.

It was first written into UK law in 1993 but has rarely been used—until last year.

Now that a national union has successfully used this individual right, I look forward to other unions and groups of workers using this weapon more widely and more often.

Dave Lyddon
Keble

We will protest at summit in Cornwall

BORIS JOHNSON claims that he chose Carbis Bay, Cornwall, as the location for the 2021 G7 Global Leaders Summit because of the “environmentally friendly” goals of the summit.

In reality, Cornwall was probably chosen largely because it was seen as the least likely area for mass, organised resistance.

All six of Cornwall’s constituencies are Conservative.

Cornwall has one of the worst transport systems in Britain

The area has suffered greatly under the Tories’



Carbis Bay in Cornwall

ten years of austerity, leaving it the second most deprived region in northern Europe.

A whopping 25-30 percent of children are in poverty here.

Given these facts it’s

insulting that Boris Johnson and the Tories are happy to have the world’s leadership stay in the picturesque parts of Cornwall.

At the same time they do nothing to improve the conditions of the poorest in the county.

The solutions that will be proposed at the summit by capitalist leaders will not be enough.

We will not accept lukewarm capitalist solutions for climate change.

Bella Smith
Newquay

Just a thought...

Thanks from a prisoner

MAY I take this opportunity to thank those of your readers who sent me and other prisoners Christmas and greetings cards in response to your website post.

Prisoners especially during this time of lockdowns, Covid-19 and lack of visits can often feel forgotten and alone.

I know most of the prisoners featured on the website and I’m sure that all appreciated cards and letters as much as I did. Thank you.

Keith Rose

A7780AG, HMP Coldingley

End bosses’ fire and rehire

I’VE READ Socialist worker reports about the British Gas strike. Fire and rehire has been a norm all of my working life. I think it’s definitely going to get worse.

@ilikaducha
On Twitter

●WE NEED to mount a fight back across unions against practices like fire and rehire.

Bosses shouldn’t get away with it.

Andy
On Twitter

Biden backs occupation

AMERICA’S “humanity” reached out across the world last week from the inauguration of Joe Biden, invoking democracy and love.

But some are forgetting the billions of dollars of weapons deals with Israeli leader Binyamin Netanyahu.

He is a figure who presides over the continuing brutal, racist, illegal and lethal occupation of Palestine by Israel.

Dave Clinch
Torrington

Flashy clothes are distraction

I COULDN’T care one bit about what Jill Biden or Kamala Harris were wearing to Joe Biden’s inauguration, like some sections of the media are.

From his history we know Biden won’t improve people’s lives and no amount of flashy clothing should distract from that fact.

Jane
Southampton

WHO IS TO BLAME IF THE POOR ARE AGAIN LEFT TO DIE?

The rollout of Covid-19 vaccination programmes helps governments claim they are in control of the coronavirus pandemic. But the vaccine isn't for everyone—the poorest are being left behind. And ultimately the scheming of powerful states and pharmaceutical firms put everyone at risk, reports Yuri Prasad

ANISHCA MORRIS never got to hold her newborn daughter. Admitted to hospital while pregnant, she was with sick with Covid-19. Her baby Azariah was delivered by C-section and quickly taken away to shield her from her mother's infection.

Anishca died shortly afterwards, leaving behind two children.

Working in the Woolworths store in Fish Hoek in the Western Cape, South Africa, she was daily exposed to the virus but given little in the way of protection. Her life was deemed doubly expendable because she was both poor and black.

Anishca had the misfortune to live in a country where Covid-19 is on the rampage and the health service has all but collapsed.

And because there is no vaccination programme on the horizon, unlike in the West, there's little hope of a brighter future for South Africa's poor. Instead there is only fear of many more tragedies.

“**The World Health Organisation says the West has hoovered up all available supplies of the vaccine**”

How the richest country in Africa can have no vaccination programme is a question that millions of people are asking. The answer is that it has no programme because it owns no vaccines—and it will be weeks, if not months, before any arrive.

President Cyril Ramaphosa insists that South Africa has bought 20 million doses which should land in the country sometime this year. But he admits he has no timeline for a planned programme to vaccinate as many as 40 million adults.

And, when the vials finally arrive, they will cost South Africa more than twice as much as those sold the European countries.

Angry Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the head of the World Health Organisation, is angry.

He says South Africa, like many countries in the Global South, has no access to vaccinations because they have all been hoovered up by Western countries.

“More than 39 million doses of vaccine have now been administered in at least 49 higher-income countries,” he said last week. “Just 25 doses have been given in one lowest-income country. Not 25 million, not 25,000, just 25.”

The low-income country Ghebreyesus was referring to is Guinea, the only one in its category to have delivered any shots so far. Earlier this month two dozen “senior officials” and the president were inoculated.

“It's not right that younger healthier adults in rich countries are vaccinated before health workers and older people

A patient sick with Covid-19 at the Khayelitsha hospital, near Cape Town, South Africa



COVAX PROJECT
Attempt to stop ‘vaccine nationalism’ has failed

THE COVAX project was supposed to be a global effort to ensure an equal distribution of coronavirus vaccines.

Administered in part by the World Health Organisation, it said it would stop “vaccine nationalism” by buying up huge quantities for distribution to poorer countries.

Covax claims to have secured a massive two billion doses—with the goal of covering 20 percent of participant countries’ populations by 2021.

But so far not a single vial has been delivered.

Lack of resources is the key to Covax’s problem. Canada is giving the programme just £180 million, while France and Germany could only find £88 million each.

The European Union proudly proclaimed its commitment by announcing it will give Covax £443 million. It later transpired that most of this was in the form of a European Development Bank loan.

in poorer countries,” Ghebreyesus went on. “The world is on the edge of catastrophic moral failure.”

Ghebreyesus is right to say it is a scandal that so many poorer countries will wait for years for vaccines. But his argument suggests that ordinary people in the rich West are somehow responsible. And it accepts as fact the pharmaceutical industry’s claim that there can only be a limited supply of vaccine.

That is not the case.

Churning

Many countries in the Global South have the ability to mass produce vaccines, including those used against Covid-19.

The New York Times newspaper reported last week that a factory in South Africa is expected to start churning out “millions of doses of the Covid-19 vaccine each day”.

But it said those vials “will probably be shipped to a distribution centre in Europe and then rushed to Western countries that have pre-ordered them”.

Laws protecting the “intellectual property rights” of big drug companies stops many more firms in the Global South from producing cheap drugs for their regions.

These “rights” are used to ban anyone from copying the ingredients of the original vaccine and making their own cheap versions of it.

But such copies are likely the only way billions of people will ever get protection from Covid-19.

Surely stopping the spread of cheap drugs that could save millions of lives is also a “catastrophic moral failure”? The trouble for Ghebreyesus is that to

admit this would fracture the World Health Organisation, which depends on the leaders of the major nations for its existence.

The way those leaders back “their” pharmaceutical companies over people’s lives can be seen in an unusual court case now underway.

The Indian and South African governments are demanding that intellectual property laws on goods related to the virus be suspended. That way they can easily produce drugs and equipment to help save lives.

Unfortunately, the court that will hear the case is part of the much-hated World Trade Organisation (WTO). This body routinely finds for global corporations and against the poor because the logic of profit is hardwired into its existence.

Nevertheless, the pharmaceutical industry is lobbying hard for the right decision from the WTO. The future of medicine is at stake, they say, because only the incentive of huge profits can make years of research into possible

“**Firms have hinted at stereotypes of ‘Third World backwardness’ to explain why only they make vaccines**”

treatments worthwhile.

And the firms have hinted at stereotypes of “Third World backwardness” to explain why high quality vaccines are mostly made in Europe and America.

The pharma company Regeneron said, “Manufacturing antibody medicines is incredibly complex and transferring the technology takes many months, as well as significant resources and skill.” It is seemingly unaware that both India and South Africa already produce similar drugs.

Intellectual

In the courtroom Big Pharma will have the backing of powerful friends, all desperate to keep intellectual property rights laws intact. They include the governments of Britain, the US, Canada and Norway, and the European Union.

But the corporate case is based on a lie. The firms never funded the research into the coronavirus vaccine. Instead they received one of the biggest handouts of state cash to private firms in the history of capitalism.

In Britain, the government-initiated Vaccine Taskforce ploughed some £33.6 billion of public money into a mixture of public and private sector research groups. The US government under Donald Trump handed AstraZeneca £900 million, Pfizer £1.4 billion and Sanofi/GlaxoSmithKline £1.5 billion. Governments across Europe also ploughed billions of Euros into their native biotech firms.

The “risk” of development was never borne by the big pharmaceutical companies. It was borne by the public.

One of the many outrages of the

India’s vaccine fear isn’t only due to spread of ‘fake news’



The world should be helping countries such as India to launch ambitious vaccination programmes—with properly tested vaccines

BIG PHARMA’S jealous hold of the vaccines it developed is leading India to use a drug that has not been fully tested as part of its programme.

The vaccine, known as Covaxin, is produced by Indian company Bharat Biotech. As it has not completed phase 3 trials there is no final data on its efficacy, or any potential side effects.

Fears that the vaccine might be dangerous are making the task of inoculating India’s 1.3 billion people far more difficult.

Already there are reports that uptake nationally is just 64 percent, and that in some states it is as low as 22 percent.

Health workers, including doctors, are supposed to be among the first vaccinated but many are refusing until there is reliable data.

In New Delhi’s largest hospital, the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, just eight healthcare workers out of an expected 100 turned up last Monday for their jab. Dr Namrata Agarwal, a

paediatrician in Kashipur, in the north east of India, is among those not eager to take the vaccine. “I’m very hesitant,” she said.

“All the protocols have been rushed and hurried through. I am not so concerned about the efficacy of a vaccine—that can vary—but what concerns me is its safety and the chance that it might cause harm.”

Bharat Biotech was last week forced to release a factsheet on its vaccine.

It said those with underlying health conditions should not be injected with Covaxin. That came as a shock to those administering the jab, who had not previously been notified of any such restriction.

Misinformation and mistrust is helping to fuel viral videos that tell people in India that vaccines in general are not safe.

And many doctors are now demanding that prime minister Narendra Modi and his hard right ministers are filmed being injected with Covaxin.

sordid scandal to stop cheap drugs is that it puts everybody, all over the world, at increased risk.

The longer the virus is allowed to circulate anywhere in the world, the more often it will mutate. Some strains will have the ability to infect more easily, and others to do more damage. And it’s possible some will emerge that are resistant to the vaccines we have today.

If this is our future, we should at least know who was really to blame.

EUROPEAN UNION
Panic buying robs world of its vital supplies

FEW EPISODES reveal the disastrous failure of the free market better than the scramble for vaccines.

The European Union (EU) began buying up the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine in the summer. But it didn’t place any firm orders until November, when the drug successfully completed its trials.

By that time Pfizer had already sold most of its production in a frenzy of bidding—so the EU got very little.

Under pressure Pfizer subsequently offered the EU 500 million more doses, but the EU turned down the firm’s offer because the French government objected.

It said that buying from Pfizer would undermine the vaccine being developed by French firm Sanofi. Yet the Sanofi vaccine is a long way from clearing its trials and is unlikely to be available until late this year.

So the EU then resorted to a desperate scramble to buy any vaccine from anywhere, at any cost.

Now Luxembourg’s foreign minister reports the EU has “secured almost two billion doses with six different manufacturers”.

Two billion is more than double the number it needs to inoculate its 450 million people with two doses. It means an equal number elsewhere in the world will go without.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

These are the core politics of the Socialist Workers Party.

INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS ACTION

Under capitalism workers' labour creates all profit. A socialist society can only be constructed when the working class seizes control of the means of production and democratically plans how they are used.

REVOLUTION NOT REFORM

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed as the established Labour and trade union leaders say.

It has to be overthrown. Capitalism systematically degrades the natural world. Ending environmental crisis means creating a new society.

THERE IS NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD

The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against the workers.

The working class needs an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates and a workers' militia.

At most parliamentary activity can be used to make propaganda against the present system.

Only the mass action of the workers themselves can destroy the system.

INTERNATIONALISM

The struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries.

We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries.

We oppose racism and imperialism. We oppose all immigration controls.

We support the right of black people and other oppressed groups to organise their own defence. We support all genuine national liberation movements.

The experience of Russia demonstrates that a socialist revolution cannot survive in isolation in one country.

In Russia the result was state capitalism, not socialism. In Eastern Europe and China a similar system was later established by Stalinist parties. We support the struggle of workers in these countries against both private and state capitalism.

We are for real social, economic and political equality of women.

We are for an end to all forms of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

We oppose discrimination against disabled people including those who experience mental distress.

We defend the right of believers to practise their religion without state interference.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To achieve socialism the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party.

Such a party can only be built by activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests.

We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

To join us, turn to page 16 or go to www.swp.org.uk or phone 020 7840 5602

Socialist Workers Party online meetings



LGBT+ history month

CHESTERFIELD

Pamphlet launch: Pride, Politics & Protest
Thu 4 Feb, 6.30pm
829-532-8731

COLCHESTER

The origins of LGBT+ oppression
Thu 11 Feb, 7.30pm
872-3074-2363

EAST MIDLANDS

Pamphlet launch: Pride Politics & Protest
Wed 3 Feb, 7pm
354-874-4790

HOME COUNTIES

The origins of LGBT+ oppression
Thu 4 Feb, 6pm
837 0931 2098

LONDON: SOUTH

Pamphlet launch: Pride Politics & Protest
Wed 3 Feb, 7pm
497-196-1801

LONDON: WALTHAM FOREST

The origins of LGBT+ oppression
Wed 3 Feb, 7.30pm
543-023-057

LONDON: WEST AND NORTH WEST

The origins of LGBT+ oppression
Thu 4 Feb, 7.30pm
824-3598-9096

MANCHESTER

Pamphlet launch: Pride Politics & Protest
Wed 3 Feb, 7.15pm
323-178-7151



The Socialist Workers Party is holding online meetings during the coronavirus crisis. This is to ensure that there can still be collective local discussion, organising and actions.

Most of the meetings will be held using the Zoom system. Download the Zoom app onto your phone or computer and just before the time given for your local meeting ask to "Join a meeting".

You can then enter the number printed on this page for the appropriate meeting. **The password for all meetings is 967537.**

Make sure you look at the SWP Facebook page facebook.com/SocialistWorkersParty for news of national online meetings and other updates.

BIRMINGHAM

Covid, job losses, pay cuts—can unions lead the fight back?
Wed 3 Feb, 7pm
281-634-5938

BRADFORD

Big Pharma, the Tories and Covid-19—will the vaccine solve the crisis?
Thu 4 Feb, 7pm
885 9187 7552

BRIGHTON & HOVE

Conspiracy theories and the far-right—how should socialists respond?
Thu 4 Feb, 6.30pm
841 2142 3683

BURNLEY & PENDLE

Palestine—still the victim of apartheid
Wed 3 Feb, 7.30pm
856 0963 2675

CAMBRIDGE

A rebel's guide to Trotsky
Thu 4 Feb, 7.30pm
681-800-4408

CARDIFF

The Egyptian Revolution—why it matters ten years on
Wed 3 Feb, 7.30pm
630-181-4857

DUNDEE, ABERDEEN & PERTH

How Slavery was ended—the story of the Haitian Revolution
Wed 3 Feb, 7.30pm
894 2628 7708

EDINBURGH

The revolutionary life and politics of Friedrich Engels
Wed 3 Feb, 7.30pm
431-459-112

GLASGOW

Upper Clyde Shipyard 50 years on—when workers take control
Thu 4 Feb, 6.30pm
851-5254-7239

HASTINGS & EASTBORNE

Climate chaos, covid and capitalism—why we need a socialist alternative to Starmer's Labour
Wed 3 Feb, 7pm
871 7107 4592

HARLOW

After Trump—is the nightmare over?
Thu 11 Feb, 7.30pm
832-8746-7480

HUDDERSFIELD

After the storming of the Capitol—Trump, the far right and the US under Biden
Wed 3 Feb, 6.30pm
290-168-1804

KENT

Big pharma, the Tories and Covid-19—will the vaccine solve the crisis?
Thu 4 Feb, 8.15pm
434-623-8064

LANCASTER AND MORECAMBE

Fighting for abortion rights—from Poland to the US and Britain
Thu 4 Feb, 7pm
992-204-9372

LEEDS

The Egyptian revolution—why it matters ten years on
Thu 4 Feb, 7pm
935-5290-8076

LIVERPOOL

Climate crisis and coronavirus—why we need system change
Wed 3 Feb, 7pm
493-925-5919

LONDON: HACKNEY

Is there a north south divide?
Thu 4 Feb, 7.30pm
798-534-2585

LONDON: HARINGEY

The Egyptian Revolution—why it matters ten years on
Wed 3 Feb, 7.30pm
459-388-1576

LONDON: ISLINGTON

A rebel's guide to the Russian Revolution
Thu 4 Feb, 7pm
874-012-7970

LONDON: NEWHAM

Anger to revolution—what makes people rise up?
Wed 3 Feb, 7.30pm
288-098-8827

LONDON: SOUTH EAST

A rebel's guide to George Orwell
Thu 4 Feb, 7pm
529-913-6390

LONDON: TOWER HAMLETS

Islamophobia and racism—the politics of fear?
Wed 3 Feb, 7.30pm
818-391-0420

NEWCASTLE

Transgender resistance, socialism and the fight for liberation
Wed 3 Feb, 7pm
368-595-2712

NORWICH

Soundtrack to the struggle
Wed 3 Feb, 7.30pm
906-652-5299

OXFORD & THAMES VALLEY

After the teachers' revolt—can workers stop the Tories?
Wed 3 Feb, 7pm
861 2001 6477

PORTSMOUTH

Fighting for abortion rights—from Poland to the US and Britain
Wed 3 Feb, 7.30pm
488-934-2809

SHEFFIELD & SOUTH YORKSHIRE

Workers, union leaders and the fight back
Thu 4 Feb, 7pm
528-174-9278

SOUTHAMPTON

Islamophobia the and politics of fear
Wed 3 Feb, 7.30pm
381-513-5080

SWANSEA & WEST WALES

Whose law and whose order—can the police be reformed?
Thu 4 Feb, 7pm
902-964-963

WIGAN

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A history of hip hop—and a look back at Kanye West

This new BBC4 documentary by producer Questlove looks at six seminal tracks. The first is a reminder of some of Kanye West's best work, writes **Sarah Bates**

"JESUS WALKS was Kanye at his most sincere, at his most spiritual, at his most pure. He successfully infused hip hop with religion while staying true to himself. We only know it could be done because Kanye did it first."

That's how producer Questlove sums up the appeal of one of Kanye West's most famous and enduring songs.

This new documentary series covers six hip hop songs in depth, and links each to the wider social, musical and political context at the time.

The first covers West, featuring some of the producers, managers and collaborators who know him best.

Songs by Queen Latifah, Run DMC, Kendrick Lamar, Outcast and Marley Marl and MC Shan all feature in later episodes.

It's a reminder of how different the West of the 1990s was.

Talking head after talking head



Questlove looks at groundbreaking tracks

explains how he was a breath of fresh air into the "glamorous" hip hop scene dominated by a more "club" sound.

But here was West, someone wanting to draw on influences of gospel and a lifetime growing up in the church.

Jesus Walks, the single that truly exploded West into the mainstream in 2004, is a cinematic masterpiece taking on his relationship with god.

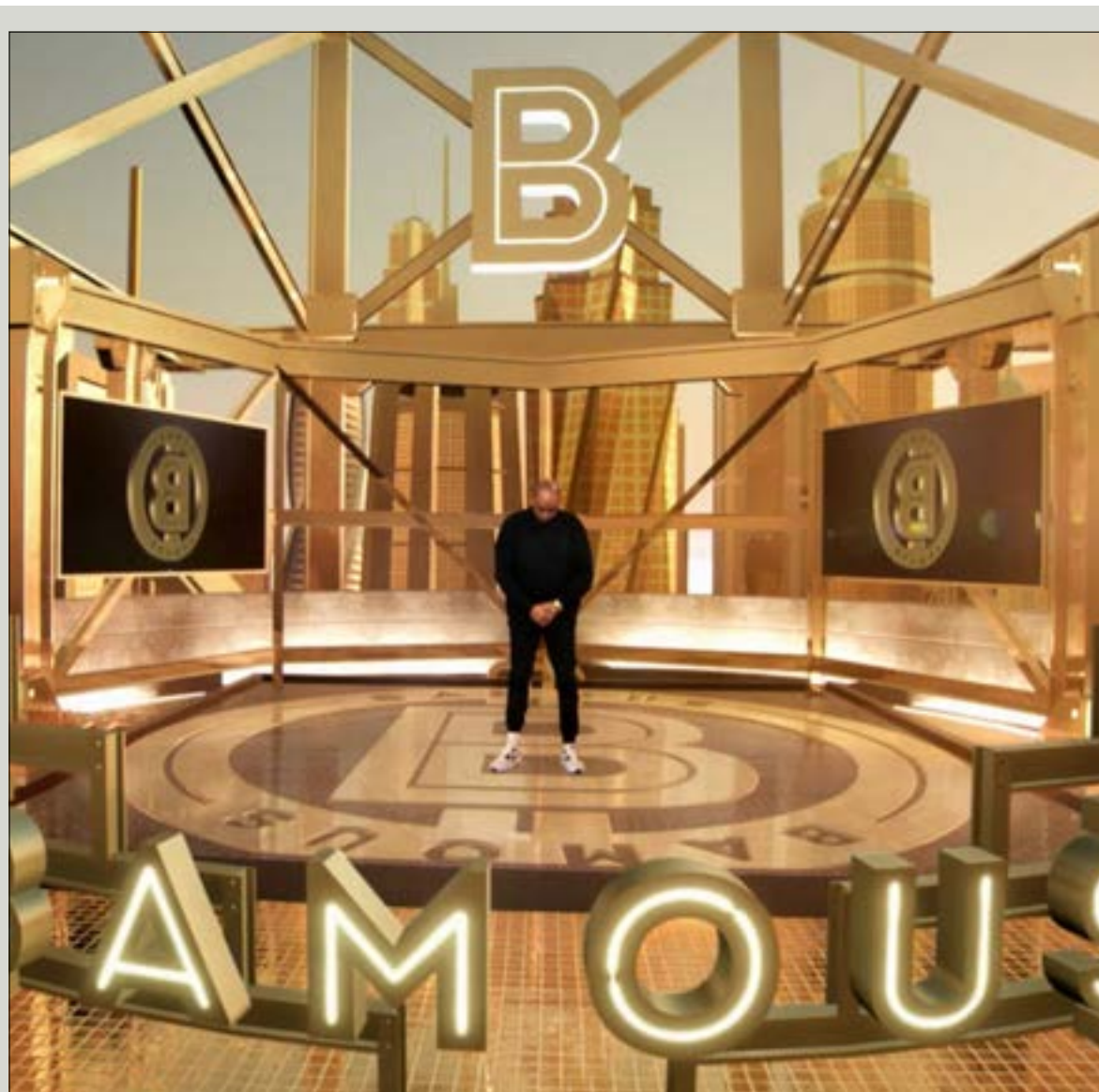
Kid Cudi, Chance the Rapper, and Childish Gambino all represent the next generation of musicians who grew up listening to early West.

Unfortunately West is now famous for his personal crises as well as his music.

But his celebrity divorce and disastrous run for president aside, it's great to be reminded of West's early musical output.

At the end of it, you'll probably just want to listen to College Dropout and enjoy it for all the reasons this excellent new documentary makes clear.

Hip Hop: Songs That Shook America, starts Friday 29 January on BBC Four



DANE BAPTISTE riffs off the 'Nasblaq'—a ranking of black celebrities

PICTURE: BBC/SPRINT MEDIA

A show that makes racism look absurd

TELEVISION

BAMOUS

Available now on bbc.co.uk/iPlayer

BAMOUS—A NEW BBC comedy show—is a cleverly constructed satire of attitudes towards black people within the BBC and wider society.

Dane Baptiste, the show's creator and presenter, is a south east Londoner who has come to the fore on the comedy circuit over the past few years. Some of his YouTube videos are worth a look. He is black and working class and consciously brings both

those elements to his comedy which is what gives it its edge. "Black lives and black wallets matter," he remarks.

But this does not veer towards cynicism. It is actually funny, which can't always be said. And surely anything that makes you laugh about any of the events of last year has to be worth a look.

Bamous—a conflation of black and famous—consists of a series of sketches built around the "Nasblaq". Here, black celebrities are ranked by their stock—see what he did there?

Much of the show is based on similar extended puns and

metaphors. For instance, beware of "white lens"—a disease which leads you to believe, among other things, that the whole world is against you.

That might be an obvious joke. But where Bamous delivers is by taking the clearly ridiculous to absurd conclusions.

In this, Baptiste—sometimes subtly, sometimes in your face—draws attention to the different ways racism manifests itself. It also points towards power structures and attitudes within the BBC—and the rest of society—that lie behind it.

Jay Williams

DOCUMENTARY

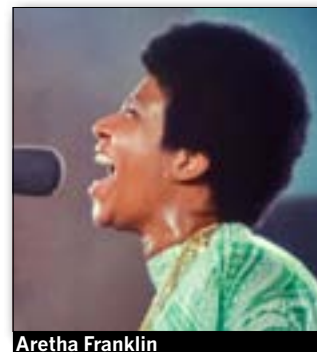
AMAZING GRACE

Available now on BBC iPlayer until 1 February

USING NEVER before seen footage, this film captures Aretha Franklin as she records the most successful gospel record of all time—Amazing Grace.

In the film Franklin records her album live at the New Temple Missionary Baptist Church in Los Angeles in 1972.

She is accompanied by the Southern California Community Choir, directed



Aretha Franklin

by Alexander Hamilton, mostly positioned behind her as Franklin sings from the church's lectern to a mostly black audience.

TELEVISION

BOY ERASED

Available now on Netflix

THIS FILM about a young man enrolled on a "gay conversion therapy" programme by his parents is now available on Netflix.

Jared Eamons is the son of Marshall Eamons, a successful car dealer and Baptist preacher in Arkansas.

He begins his first day at the Love In Action gay conversion therapy assessment programme in



Lucas Hedges in Boy Erased

Memphis, Tennessee.

Chief therapist Victor Sykes instructs participants to perform harsh "moral inventories" of themselves and their families.

He demands they don't tell anyone else about what occurs during the sessions. The film—based on a true story—reveals the horrifying realities of what "gay conversion therapy" involves.

THE inauguration of Joe Biden signals the long-awaited end of Donald Trump's presidency of horror.

Activists across the world will be glad to see the world's biggest racist, sexist, homophobic, bigoted Islamophobe leave the White House.

In his farewell message Trump claimed he was "the only true outsider ever to win the presidency".

But this only summarises how he wanted to be seen.

Trump—a reality star billionaire—put himself forward as the anti-establishment candidate who would "drain the swamp" and represent ordinary people.

It worked against Hillary Clinton in 2016 and almost worked against Biden. Trumpism was an attempt to solve the crisis in US politics.

Trump wasn't the outsider that he claimed to be. He represented both continuity and break with what had come before him. He clashed with parts of the ruling class but also served them.

A section of the ruling class believed he was the solution to their problems. But Trump wasn't there just to do their bidding. He brought his own dynamic by reaching out to other forces, including the far right.

Throughout his presidency he tried to balance his supporter base, in particular his dangerous far right fandom, with governing in the way the US establishment wanted him to.

This tension shifted during his four-year presidency. He used both the elites and right wing when it suited him, and both used him.

Trumpism was an experiment between building a popular base and keeping in line with the ruling classes.

He became an ideological core for a populist movement, yet was sometimes forced to denounce fascist groups due to his relationship with the ruling classes.

Some present Trump as a total aberration. But his election win came out of a deep crisis in the US that neoliberal politics failed to offer an answer to.

Some analysts have seen Trump as a variety of what Karl Marx called "Bonapartism". They treat him as a completely different form of rule than the norm, and one based on violence and dictatorship.

But Trump was not trying to declare his own regime with the support of bosses and generals.

Marx used the term to describe the rule of French emperor Louis Napoleon. His regime was a form of military dictatorship, "rule by the sword".

Marx saw this as a

NOW THAT Trump's presidency is over, how will we judge his time in the White House?

SO WHO WAS TRUMP REALLY?

Donald Trump has left the White House but debates over his legacy will rage on. Isabel Ringrose looks at how socialists should understand his time in office

government that emerged when the class struggle had ended in a form of stalemate.

Louis Napoleon appeared to rise above classes and the traditional political parties. He relied even more than "normal" governments on the state's repressive forces.

But the appearance of independence was not a reality. Louis Napoleon ruled clearly in the interests of the capitalists and the big landowners.

Leon Trotsky later used Bonapartism to describe the rule of a "judge-arbiter between two camps in struggle".

Trotsky added, "Bonapartism represents in the social sense, always and at all epochs, the



Class struggle was not so high that business wanted him to break from the present forms of political rule

Kyle Rittenhouse

with the ruling class, Trump benefitted it by being pro-rich and pro tax cuts for the wealthy.

He tapped into culture wars—rampaging up patriotism to weaken the working class and deflect blame onto minorities.

Trump signed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act in 2017 to reduce the corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 20 percent.

THE TOP 1 percent of taxpayers—who have an income over £566,788 a year—were expected to receive 83 percent of gains from the act by 2027.

And through his Covid-19 bailout scheme, Trump loaned almost £200 million to 100 companies that are owned or operated by his donors.

But he did clash with sections of big business. Biden raised almost twice as many large contributions for his election campaign than Trump, showing that US capitalists see Biden as a safer pair of hands.

"I like chaos. It really is good," Trump once said. This was not good news for some fat cats who want a stable market to grab profits from.

The Financial Times reported that 15 chief executive officers of top corporations on the US stock exchange backed Trump. But twice as many donated to Biden's campaign.

The ongoing crisis in the system meant different wings of the ruling class looked to different solutions—for some Trump fitted into that.

But he split bosses over his import tariffs of 25 percent on steel and 10 percent on aluminium. Aimed at targeting China in his trade wars, the tariffs also hit the interests of some major capitalists.

Trump also unsettled sections of the state with his attacks on the Nato nuclear alliance and his disregard for US allies.

Ex-marine Jim Mattis, Trump's former defence secretary, quit after disagreements—such as over Iran and using troops on BLM protesters.

Elites such as Mattis care about US dominance as a global superpower and did not want this endangered by a reckless Trump.

But Trump's warmongering ways were also popular. During his presidency the Pentagon made the largest weapons deal in US military history and defence spending increased by 16 percent.

Trump's government shut-down—the longest in US history—pushed senior Republicans away to avoid being associated with his chaos.

Yet Republicans in the Senate still voted in Trump's favour in his trial following impeachment by the House of Representatives.

It was his relationship with fascists that made him different from any previous president.

Trump used the alt right to build a base of supporters around his existing middle class one, despite not being a fascist himself.

His political base was formed by right wing populism. Not every Trump supporter wearing his memorabilia was a fascist—but his policies coalesced such forces around him.

He defended right wing teenager Kyle Rittenhouse, who killed two anti-racists at a BLM demonstration in Wisconsin last August.

During the first 2020 presidential debate Trump also told the fascist Proud Boys to "stand back and stand by" if he lost the election. And he promoted far right conspiracy theories such as QAnon.

But the ruling elite still had the power to rein him back in, showing Trump is not so separate from them as he may claim.

THE STORMING of the Capitol building was used by the far right as a bold declaration of action to rally troops behind them.

Trump told his supporters to "take back our country". He instructed them to march to the Capitol to "show strength" and "fight like hell".

During the violence that left five dead, Trump posted on his social media that he loved the fascist-led rioters, describing them as "great patriots" and "very special".

Republican leaders, such as Republican Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell and vice president Mike Pence distanced themselves from Trump.

So a week later Trump condemned the violence, saying "all Americans were horrified by the assault".

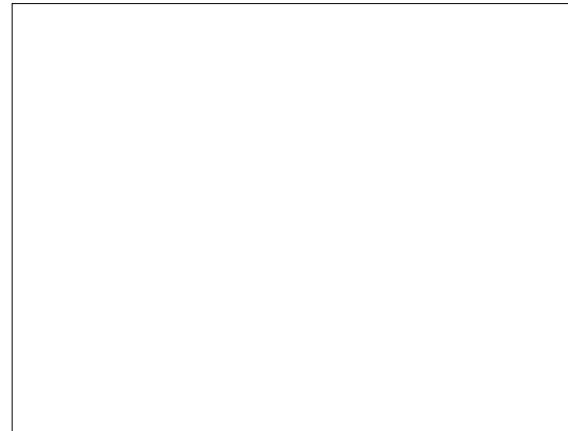
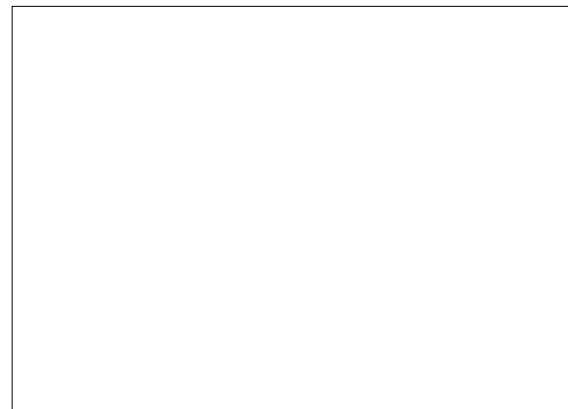
After Charlottesville in 2017 the establishment again distanced themselves from Trump, forcing him to act.

During a neo-Nazi march, a car drove into anti-fascist protesters killing a woman and injuring a further 19. Yet Trump insisted that there "were very fine people, on both sides".

Trump's response isolated him from his enemies within the Republican Party.

He was forced to fire far right figure Steve Bannon less than a week later.

It shows how Trump was pulled back into line and had to divert the blame.



Donald Trump gave confidence to far right movements in the US and in Britain (top). Trump faced criticism when the National Guard and the army were deployed to beat back Black Lives Matter protests (above)

Trump drew on the right wing "traditional forces such as the Tea Party activists. They had set out in 2009 to back strictly conservative candidates in numerous Republican primaries. They like Trump.

Many Republicans liked the votes that Trump produced while at the same time feeling uneasy about him. It's been "a helluva journey" as senior Republican Lindsey Graham cynically said in the Senate recently.

Trump may not have always lined up with those at the top, but he did at key moments. He was a part of maintaining the ruling class.

The policies Biden now represents will provide fertile ground for the dangerous fascist movements Trump has helped build.

Biden provides nothing for workers, or any solutions to the crisis the US is mired in. He is part of the system that created the conditions for Trump.

What Trump represented and the movement he created will not be defeated while the working class is offered only failing centrist politics.

Revolutionaries must unite with those on the left to build united resistance and socialist politics to smash Trump's legacy for good.

READ MORE

Under the Cover of Chaos: Trump and the Battle for the American Right

● Lawrence Grossberg £14.99

Chosen by God: Donald Trump, the Christian right and American Capitalism

● John Newsinger £7

The end of a nightmare: where next after the US elections?
Iannis Delatolas and Clare Lemlich

● International Socialist Journal bit.ly/usarticle

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The Egyptian Revolution—what role did the army play?

Ten years ago this week protests erupted in Egypt and troops were deployed on the streets. Nick Clark looks at the role of the army in the early days of the revolution

AFTER MASSES of ordinary Egyptian people had seen off the cops and burned down police stations, the army appeared on the streets.

Dictator Hosni Mubarak hoped the soldiers would restore "order". But instead protesters stood on tanks and waved Egyptian flags. They chanted, "The army and the people are one hand."

All that week, huge demonstrations in cities demanding the fall of Mubarak had become intense battles with police, culminating in a "Friday of Rage".

On Friday 28 January, 2011—ten years ago this week—battles took place at every major road into Tahrir Square in the capital city Cairo. Special riot police used tear gas, rubber bullets, then live ammunition and armoured vehicles against protesters.

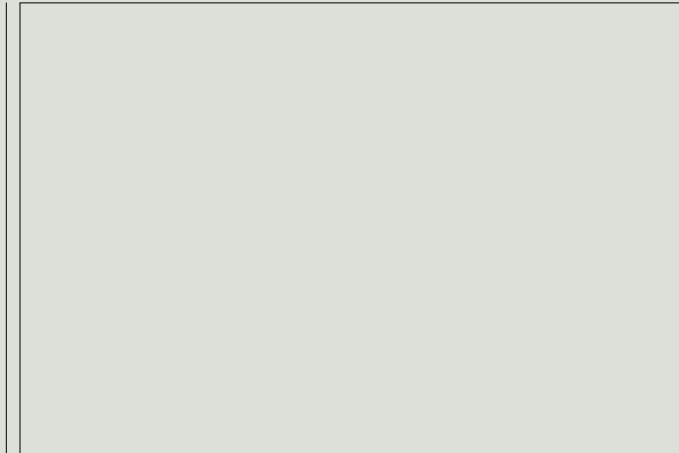
But they were overwhelmed and driven off the streets.

Tanks

In the wake of the battle, the arrival of tanks looked like a threat. But protesters rushed to embrace the soldiers "with remarkable spontaneity," wrote Egyptian socialist and participant in the revolution Sameh Naguib.

"This was not as many people remarked, simply confusion among the masses about the real role of the army, although such confusion existed," he said. "It was rather a brilliant and rapid neutralisation of the armed forces in the squares and the streets, making it near impossible for the soldiers and young officers to shoot at the people even if they were ordered to."

It marked a key point in the early days of the revolution—a moment when the regime began to crack and turn in on itself.



THE ARMY was initially embraced by protesters

The army was a major part of the Egyptian state. Mubarak's support was a pillar of the US's control of the Middle East. So the US plied Egypt's army with billions of dollars and special training for officers.

But the army did more than just serve Mubarak. It also controlled vast swathes of manufacturing and agriculture making up about 20 percent of the Egyptian economy.

They had been loyal to Mubarak because they had just as much of a stake in the regime as he did. They were never on the side of the revolution.

Yet the majority of soldiers and junior officers were conscripts from working class, peasant or lower middle class backgrounds.

The generals were terrified that, if they ordered the soldiers to fire on the protesters, they would join the revolution instead.

"The army leaders were prepared to sacrifice Mubarak to save the regime that ultimately rested on their ability to keep their power over



It was up to the protesters to organise their own defence

their troops," wrote Sameh.

Military spokesperson general Ismail Othman declared that the army recognised the legitimate demands of the protesters and wouldn't shoot them.

But it didn't protect them either.

After the defeat of the police, regime figures and their billionaire backers recruited thugs to attack the protesters in Tahrir Square.

On 2 February the army told protesters in the square to disperse. Later that day gangs armed with rocks, clubs, whips, machetes and Molotov cocktails attacked the square from all sides—some charging in on horses and camels.

Battle

It was up to the protesters to organise their own defence. The army stood by while the battle raged all night.

It was ordinary people who eventually overthrew Mubarak. But he was replaced by a military council led by some of his top generals who had no interest in the revolution.

The people and army leaders were on very different sides—they were not one hand.

The army had to give in to some of the revolution's demands. But it wasn't long before the revolution became a struggle against the generals that once pretended to be on its side.

This is the first in a series of articles on Egypt in revolution Read our coverage at bit.ly/EgyptSW2021

Silvertown Tunnel plan risks lives, say campaigners

by SAMORD

DOCTORS AND healthcare workers have warned that plans for a new tunnel under the Thames will be an “assault on health” for some of the poorest people in London.

In a letter released last week, 25 GPs, nurses and specialists said the proposed Silvertown Tunnel will funnel traffic into east London’s poorest boroughs.

The proposed four lane tunnel—including a dedicated lane for HGVs—will make air pollution in those boroughs significantly worse.

Victoria Rance from the Stop Silvertown Tunnel Coalition told Socialist Worker, “Roads are already congested, we have awful air quality. This will bring more of that.

Asthma

“It’s unique to have HGV only lanes. The tunnel will worsen air quality and affect birth rate, asthma of children and the climate emergency.

“Many locals, MPs and councillors are opposed to

it. But London mayor Sadiq Khan won’t listen to them. We don’t really understand why he’s doing it—who’s pushing him?”

In their letter, addressed to Tower Hamlets mayor John Biggs, the 25 health

workers branded the tunnel “an assault on the health of east Londoners and on the climate”.

“It is now widely accepted that without drastic action the planet is hurtling towards catastrophic, irreversible

climate change,” they said.

Air pollution kills tens of thousands of people a year in Britain.

In the east London borough of Newham, residents are victims to a level of airborne particulate matter that

is 35 percent greater than World Health Organisation’s guidelines. Activists in the Stop Silvertown Tunnel Coalition have been campaigning against the tunnel for eight years.

And their fight is growing.

London mayor Sadiq Khan faces growing pressure from below to oppose the plans. Rosamund Kissi-Debrah—the mother of Ella Kissi-Debrah who died from air pollution in 2013—wrote to him asking him to halt the plans.

“I am kindly asking the mayor of London to take another look at the tunnel as there is absolutely no evidence that air quality will improve,” she said.

Yet Khan insists on ploughing ahead with the £2 billion project, outsourced to private consortium Riverlinx. He claims the tunnel “will play a crucial role in tackling congestion and improving air quality”.

But as the 25 health workers pointed out, “New roads just increase traffic and with it, pollution.

“We cannot see the rationale behind building another

road crossing across the Thames.”

Mike Bold from Extinction Rebellion Newham told Socialist Worker the tunnel would put people’s health at risk for the sake of keeping HGVs moving.

Priorities

The tunnel “is for people driving through or for lorries,” he said. “Newham has the North Circular, City Airport and now the tunnel. Sadiq Khan’s priorities aren’t the same as ours.”

Campaigners also point out that the tunnel goes against the London Assembly’s target to become carbon neutral by 2030.

Mike said the money spent on the tunnel should be used to build green infrastructure instead.

“We need to cycle and walk more, but we need a long term plan and better public transport that diverts the need for cars,” he said.

The Silvertown Tunnel puts business and commercial interests ahead of people’s lives and safety.

It should be scrapped.

CONGESTION AT the Blackwall tunnel, near the site of the proposed new development

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School workers up to 7 times more likely to catch Covid-19

Education staff are paying the price for the Tories' dangerous push to keep students in the classroom. **Sadie Robinson** looks at the data that shows how workers have been put at risk

WORKERS in schools are up to seven times more likely to contract coronavirus than the general population.

The shocking figure, based on Department for Education (DfE) data released last week, makes a mockery of Tory claims that schools are safe.

The government has been collecting this data, on numbers of education staff with confirmed virus cases, since October.

Using these figures, the NEU union calculated that staff in special schools are nearly seven times as likely to contract Covid-19 as the general population.

Teaching assistants and other staff in schools are three times more likely to become infected. Special school teachers are two times more likely to catch Covid-19. And teachers in primary and secondary schools are 1.9 times more likely to contract it.

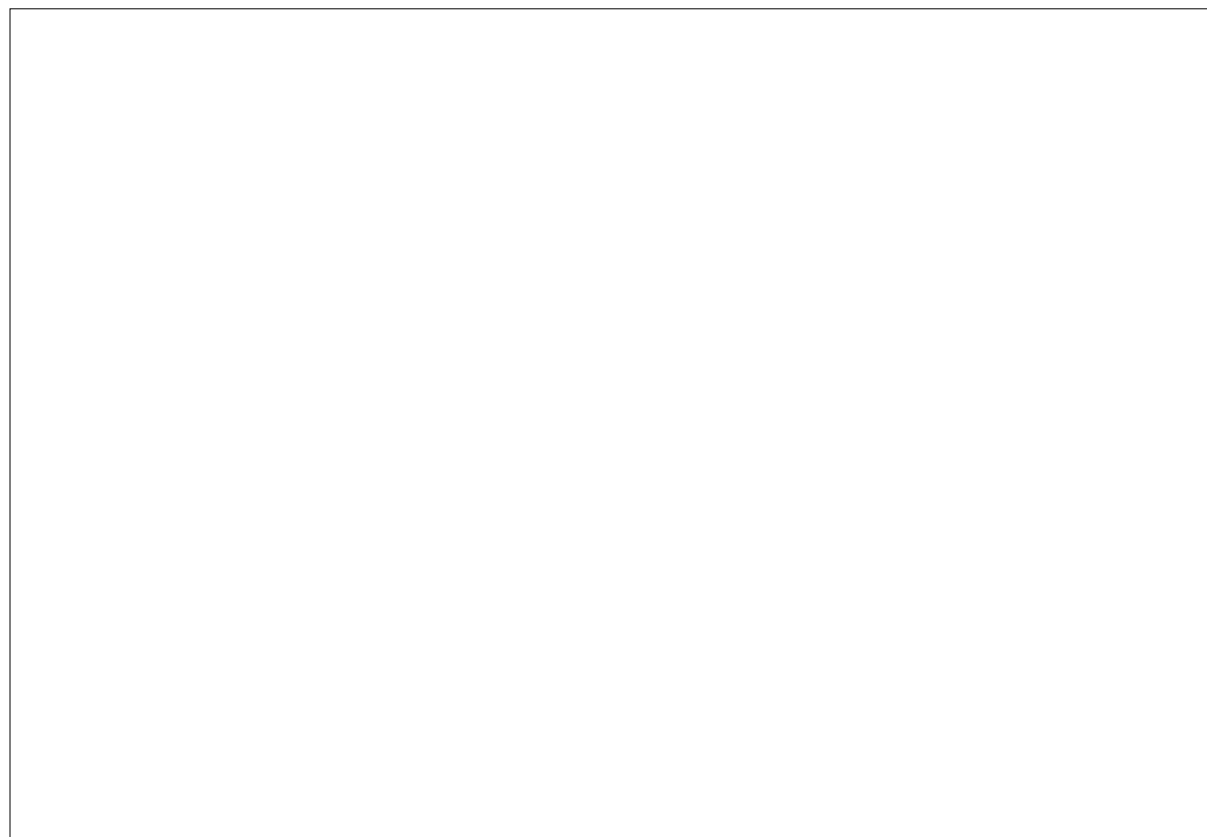
NEU joint general secretary Mary Bousted asked, "Why have ministers repeatedly told school staff and the public that there was no reason for concern? Why did ministers deny clinically extremely vulnerable staff the right to work from home?"

Pressure

The figures put more pressure on a government already in crisis over its school strategy. The Tories hoped to drive children and workers back to classrooms with a plan to roll out daily coronavirus tests.

But last Wednesday ministers announced a "pause" to the plan for daily tests in secondary schools after the medicines regulator refused to endorse it. It had already cost £78 million and education secretary Gavin Williamson had claimed it was a "milestone moment".

The Tories have knowingly put lives



STUDENTS AND workers were pushed back into environments that are unsafe

at risk. On Tuesday the Commons Education Select Committee (ESC) heard evidence about what the government knew about the new variant of Covid-19 and when.

In December, the Tories took legal action against Greenwich council in south London to force schools to stay open.

Last week Williamson told the ESC that "none of us knew" about the new variant at that time. It isn't true. At 3.38pm on Monday 14 December,

health secretary Matt Hancock told the House of Commons that a new variant of coronavirus had been identified. He said it might be linked to the faster spread of the virus in the south of England.

At 5pm the same day the DfE issued a legal direction ordering Greenwich council to keep schools open.

DfE scientific adviser Osama Rahman told the ESC the letter had been written before Hancock's statement. But the government

still chose to issue it following the statement. And the ESC heard that the government was aware of alarming rises in virus cases in some areas on 10 December. That's when it ordered mass testing in some schools in London, Essex and Kent.

It was confirmed that the new variant was more transmissible on Monday 21 December, the ESC heard.

On Monday 4 January the Tories were still trying to force all schools to fully reopen.

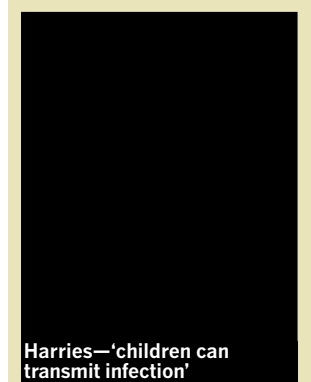
Too early to reopen schools

DESPITE evidence that fully open schools and other settings are not safe, there is still a drive to get them fully reopened quickly.

Jenny Harries, deputy chief medical officer for England, has said the idea of schools fully reopening after the February half term "seems perfectly reasonable".

She said on Tuesday of last week that the virus was "hopefully starting to level off".

But Britain recorded what was then its



Harries—'children can transmit infection'

highest ever number of deaths in a 24-hour period from Covid-19, some 1,610, on the same day.

The next day a new record of 1,820 was set.

Harries herself said that she couldn't guarantee "that there wouldn't be another variant or some other epidemiological change" between now and half term.

And she admitted, "School children definitely can transmit infection in schools—they can transmit it in any environment."

'We can fight by organising in every nursery in the country'

THE LONDON Early Years Foundation has been forced to close over a third of its settings since the start of the year due to outbreaks of coronavirus.

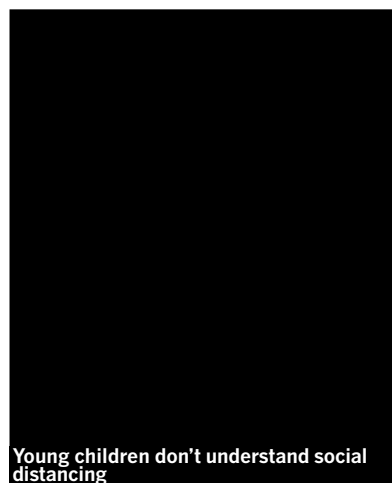
As of 18 January, it had closed 14 out of 39 nurseries and said more would follow.

Some 48 positive cases had been recorded at the foundation in January alone, including 22 in a week at one nursery.

Four staff have been hospitalised with the virus.

Boss June O'Sullivan said Covid-19 is "spreading like wildfire" among nursery staff.

"What was the DfE saying about nurseries being low risk???" she



Young children don't understand social distancing

tweeted. Paula, a nursery worker in Cambridge, told Socialist Worker that "it feels that we are in a state of emergency in nursery settings".

"The government is starving us of our funding and forcing staff and children into unsafe settings," she said.

There are still claims that younger children play a minor role in transmitting coronavirus.

Yet by the end of term in December, primary aged children were the second most infected of all age groups.

Office for National Statistics figures showed that more than one in 40 secondary pupils and one in 50 primary pupils had tested

positive. They showed a sharp rise in cases among children aged between 2 years old and school year six in the first half of December.

A widespread refusal to return to work by primary school staff helped to force the government to include schools in the latest lockdown. More resistance is urgently needed to save lives.

"You can only fight this by organising in each nursery team and with others across the country," said Paula.

"We need to support a call for a national ballot over safety and funding.

"We need our collective union strength."

BENEFITS

Legal win in childcare fight

by SADIE ROBINSON

A WOMAN has won a legal challenge against the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) over its childcare benefit rules.

Nichola Salvato had challenged the DWP over its Universal Credit (UC) childcare payments system.

A “proof of payment” rule means claimants have to pay for childcare costs up front, then claim money back.

But a court last week ruled that this is unlawful and discriminatory.

Nichola previously told Socialist Worker that she had to “borrow from friends and family, and take out loans” to cover the costs.

Eventually she was forced to cut her working hours to reduce childcare costs —making her more dependent on benefits.

“That frustrated me,” said Nichola. “The government says the aim of UC is to help people into work.”

Mr Justice Chamberlain



Nichola—pushed into debt by UC

said in a judgement last week that the proof of payment rule “discriminates indirectly against women”. He said it has “disproportionately prejudicial effects on women” in two ways.

Firstly, more than 80 percent of those claiming the childcare costs element (CCE) of UC are women. Secondly, the rule “is bound to have a greater adverse effect on women because women as a group earn substantially less than men as a group”.

“It follows that women are substantially more likely than men to be denied access to the CCE because they do not have enough money to pay childcare charges out of their own funds before being reimbursed,” he said.

And the judge dismissed the government’s argument that it needed the rule to prevent fraud. He said it is “not obvious” why basing the system on liability to pay would be any more likely to lead to fraud or error.

The system is eventually expected to affect 500,000 parents when UC is fully rolled out. The DWP is appealing against the judgement.

New building regulator doesn’t go far enough

by ISABEL RINGROSE

THE GOVERNMENT has announced a new regulator for construction products following evidence at the Grenfell Tower Inquiry—but campaigners say it’s not nearly enough.

The regulator will be able to ban dangerous materials, such as those used on Grenfell. And the companies that make them could be prosecuted and face fines or up to three months imprisonment.

But Grenfell Community Campaign organiser Leearna told Socialist Worker that those affected by the fire are “not impressed”.

“The first thing is that it is too late for our 72 and too late for all the new builds around the country now covered in the same types of flammable materials,” she explained.

“We see the announcement as a political quieting of the masses—nothing more than a public relations exercise. They were under pressure and had to show they were doing something.”

“Ultimately, we cannot trust this Tory government. We are not blind to the fact that many of the guilty construction industry corporates are major financial contributors to the Tory party.”

“They provide a money stream that our corrupt political leaders are not going to put at risk.”

Estimated

Other groups agree. The UK Cladding Action Group called the measures “too little too late”. This is also true for the estimated 175,000 leaseholders trapped in high-rise homes that are covered in hazardous products.

“The firms Kingspan, Celotex and Arconic have faced no consequences—they are still making profits,” campaigners Grenfell United added.

“Consequences for companies involved in Grenfell would be the best way for the government to send a message it was serious about cracking down. This is not an industry that deserves a clean slate.”

Leearna said, “We continue to fight for the thousands of people stuck in homes that they threw their life savings into but that are now worthless.”

“They are trapped and this government continues to fail them. Legislation we want to see includes forcing those who made these materials, and the contractors who put them onto buildings, into paying to make them safe.”

“Real change needs to be much broader than what has now been announced.”

News that the inquiry into the devastating fire will recommence



THE NEW body won’t address how residents are stuck in buildings covered in flammable cladding

remotely via Zoom on 8 February has caused further anger.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry paused over the Christmas break, and delayed restarting due to the lockdown.

Leearna said that “conducting the inquiry in a remote forum merely allows space for the guilty to protect themselves even further”.

“It’s a travesty,” she said. “The majority of our group feel that there is doubt about where the directive to go remote has come from.”

“The Inquiry used Covid-19 to keep the bereaved, survivors and the public out. Now this shuts down the protest outside the Inquiry, so again community voices are quieted.”

Weekly protests began after survivors and the bereaved were denied entry after the first lockdown last March.

Leearna said that concerns have been raised “about the lack of any one-to-one personal scrutiny witnesses will be under via a remote forum”.

“We all agree that this is contrary to achieving either truth or justice. The only parties this serves are those responsible for causing the fire,” she said.

“We will continue to fight, with eyes fully open, for truth, justice and change.”

OBITUARY

Ann Rose 1927-2021

COMRADES IN Greater Manchester were very sad to learn of the death of our comrade Ann Rose on 1 January, aged 93.

Ann was a working class woman who lived in Stockport all her life, and a tenacious fighter for socialism.

She left school to work in a local cotton mill and never forgot the hardships that mill workers endured.

Ann was a member of the Labour Party for many years and was active in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament alongside her husband, Frank.

After her son Louis joined the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the late 1980s, Ann began to attend meetings and soon joined herself.

She often said that she wished she had found us sooner and, although she joined in later life, Ann did



Ann Rose

not let age hold her back. If there was a picket line, a demonstration, or a paper sale, she would be there, always cheerful, whatever the weather.

Ann was active in the Anti Nazi League too and in 2003, Ann threw herself into the anti-war movement.

We remember Ann’s warm and sunny personality and her optimism that revolutionary socialism can win a better world. These are inspirational memories to take with us into future struggles.

We send condolences to Louis and Bilkis and their children, Ann’s grandsons, Ismail and Zain.

Greater Manchester SWP

SCAFFOLDERS

Scaffolders build action to win on pay

AROUND 50 scaffolders began a 48-hour strike over pay on Monday at British Steel's Scunthorpe plant in Lincolnshire.

Workers held socially-distanced picket lines at the plant on Monday.

Socialist Worker supporter Trevor Jones, who went to the picket to show solidarity, reports that it was a "solid strike with workers in good spirits".

One striking worker said, "I rely on overtime at the moment to survive. If we win it will mean a better quality of life, more time with the family."

The Unite union members are responsible for the maintenance of over 500 scaffolding structures at the site. They are employed by contractor Brand Energy.

The dispute began in 2019.

Demanding

Workers are demanding to be paid in line with the National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry (Naeci).

There is a difference of £2 an hour between their current pay rates and the



WORKERS ON the picket line on Monday

PICTURE: TREVOR JONES

established Naeci pay rates.

Since 2019, Brand Energy has refused to engage with Unite over the pay dispute.

The workforce responded by delivering a 100 percent yes vote in favour of strikes.

Further strikes were set for Monday and Wednesday next week and on the same days the following week.

Unite says the dispute is

made more complex as Brand Energy will lose the scaffolding contract on 15 February when it will transfer to another firm, Activo.

If the matter is not resolved, Unite will begin balloting for fresh industrial action with Activo, once the contract transfers.

Unite regional officer John McIntyre said, "There are

clear pay rates established for this type of highly skilled work and Brand Energy are deliberately undermining them.

"Our members play a crucial role in maintaining safety on the British Steel site and deserve to be paid the correct rate for the job."

● Tweet messages of support to @UniteNEYH

SCOTLAND

SNP's lacklustre indy plan

THE SCOTTISH National Party (SNP) has announced a new plan to supposedly take forward the push for independence.

But it avoids all the key issues. First minister Nicola Sturgeon said first there must be a pro-independence majority after May's Scottish elections.

If there is the SNP would call for a "legal" referendum to take place "after the pandemic" and "in the early part of the new term".

Legal

She added that an SNP government will "vigorously oppose" any legal challenge from the Tory government.

The SNP says there is no "moral justification" for the Tories to refuse the request for a referendum.

Good luck appealing to Tory morals.

The SNP's leadership has come up with a form of words that avoids the crucial question.

This is what will happen when Boris Johnson says

no to a Section 30 order—the permission needed to run a "legal referendum".

Sturgeon has repeatedly stressed that the SNP's strategy is "legal and constitutional".

The Tories, well aware of the threat to the unity of the British state, will do their best to avoid a referendum.

Scottish Labour continues to oppose a referendum.

And former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown is reprising his "save the union" show from 2014.

He says that the United Kingdom "must urgently rediscover what holds it together" or become a "failed state".

The SNP strategy will not work.

It is a sop to try to tell activists that there is a genuine way forward when it is really the same strategy of relying on the methods of mainstream politics.

It is a positive sign that a new grassroots membership organisation is forming.

Charlotte Ahmed

NHS

Porters renew strikes

PORTERS AT Heartlands Hospital in Birmingham are preparing to strike next week.

The Unison union members will be taking to picket lines for three days from Tuesday 1 February. They have already held 11 days of strikes.

The long-running dispute centres on bosses' plans to impose a new rota that will force workers onto rotating shifts that will hugely disrupt porters' lives.

The change is set to take place on 1 February.

Striker Royston Bray has worked for the hospital for 23 years. He said, "There are going to be nine different start times. You'll be doing a couple of days of one shift and then have a day off. Then you'll be doing a couple of days on the next shift."

"So many porters have got commitments. Some are carers, and some take their kids to school or childminders. People just won't be able to cope."

Unison regional organiser

Claire Breeze said, "How can a publicly-run National Health Service dismiss their staff and re-engage them because negotiations have failed?"

Anger at management finds a particular focus when directed against the chair of University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Trust—former Labour home secretary Jacqui Smith.

The city's eight Labour MPs have written to Smith condemning the firing and rehiring.

Smith is perhaps best known for her part in the MPs' expenses scandal, which the former chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life described as "near fraudulent".

● Donations to Unison University Hospitals Birmingham Branch 22536, Unity Trust Bank, account number: 20403849, sort code: 60-83-01

● Messages of support to William.Morris@uhb.nhs.uk and Lee.Williams2@uhb.nhs.uk

TRANSPORT

New strike at Heathrow takes on fire and rehire

UNITE UNION members at Heathrow Airport (HAL) are striking again next month in a bitter dispute over fire and rehire of the entire 4,000-strong workforce.

Workers went on strike for four days in December, and will be going out again on 5 February.

The fire and rehire of the workforce will result in workers facing up to 25 percent pay cuts—equivalent to £8,000 a year.

Unite regional coordinating officer Wayne King said, "Our members—who are being forced to move home, downsize their properties or give up their cars because of the cuts imposed on them by Heathrow airport—are determined to keep fighting."

"The cuts imposed by HAL are all about

greed and not need."

■ ALMOST 500 Manchester bus drivers at Go North West are at risk of being fired and rehired. This will see a 10 percent reduction in the workforce and conditions worsen.

Workers will be nearly £2,500 worse off per year and be forced to work longer hours with no additional pay.

Workers have notified bosses of their intention to organise a strike ballot.

■ UNITE UNION members employed by Eddie Stobart Ltd at its Warrington depot on the Walkers Pepsico contract are preparing to strike.

An overtime ban will be followed by four days of strikes from 17 February to 20 February.

NEU UNION

Fight to stop victimisation

AN ONLINE rally in solidarity with victimised NEU union reps was set to take place on Wednesday of this week.

It follows a growing number of victimisations.

Louise Lewis, a NEU rep from Huddersfield, has been suspended since October after raising concerns about coronavirus safety measures.

John Boken, a NEU rep at Shrewsbury Colleges Group, faces a disciplinary after raising issues about management bullying.

John told Socialist Worker, "Management at my college has decided to punish me rather than work with me."

"I will not give up fighting a toxic management system that would rather blame and accuse than work with teachers and unions."

NEU members have delivered a 95 percent vote for strikes in support of John.

● Rally Wed 27 January, 6.30pm. Go to bit.ly/2701rally

UNIVERSITIES & COLLEGES

Battles grow to save jobs

MORE COLLEGE and university workers are moving towards fights to stop job cuts.

UCU union members at Roehampton university last week passed a motion to request a "move to a ballot for industrial action immediately".

The motion was passed by 89 percent. It follows a consultative ballot where 64 percent backed strikes on a 70 percent turnout.

At Leicester university, general secretary Jo Grady joined a large meeting of UCU members on Monday.

The meeting voted overwhelmingly to oppose all compulsory redundancies and to "ballot for sustained industrial action" with no votes against.

And at Chichester College, UCU members have unanimously voted to declare a dispute to save jobs in Maths and English. The UCU has also pledged to resist plans to close Goole College.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Confronting library cuts

ACTIVISTS IN Tower Hamlets, east London, are preparing for battle as their council tries to slash library services.

The Labour-run council wants to close Cubitt Town library, cut the opening hours at Bethnal Green library by 15 a week and reduce Watney Market library from three storeys to one.

The attacks would mean

the equivalent of 35 full time jobs going.

This is from the same council that implemented its own version of fire and rehire on its workers last year.

Over 180 workers, Tower Hamlets residents and library campaigners joined a Save Our Libraries meeting called by the GMB, Unison and Unite unions on Tuesday last week.

STRONG STRIKES HIT BRITISH GAS

by SOPHIE SQUIRE

AROUND 7,000 British Gas workers launched their eighth day of strikes on Monday against bosses' fire and rehire plans.

They are fighting parent company Centrica's plan to sack and rehire many thousands of workers on worse pay and terms and conditions.

A TUC union federation survey released on Monday underlined the importance of the issue for all workers.

It showed that nearly one in ten workers have been told to reapply for their jobs on worse terms and conditions or face the sack.

And almost a quarter say their conditions have been downgraded since the first lockdown in March.

Vanguard

British Gas strikers are in the vanguard of resistance to such measures. They planned further strikes for Friday, Saturday and Sunday this week and Monday next week.

Bosses have tried to pressure workers into accepting a contract that imposes hourly pay



STRIKERS PROTESTED at Centrica's headquarters on Monday

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

5 percent below agreed rates and other changes.

Kevin, a striking British Gas engineer, told Socialist Worker, "We were met with a barrage of emails, texts and phone calls about signing

the new contract from head office."

The firm even tried to bribe workers into submission. "In December the company offered us a transition payment," said Kevin. "They

offered us £2,500 and extra holiday leave if we signed. But we said no."

Dan, another British Gas engineer, told Socialist Worker that the outcome of this strike will have

widespread implications. "There will be shock waves if the company pulls this off—and it will be felt in every home and potentially by every worker in the private sector in Britain," he said.

British Gas bosses have told workers that if they don't sign contracts by 31 March they will lose their jobs.

They are banking on a time of hardship to force workers to accept the changes.

Mistake

But Kevin said they've "made the mistake of picking on a workforce that is highly unionised".

"A lot of engineers won't sign this contract," he said. "We are skilled workers and our skills are in demand."

"We aren't going to blink first."

Centrica's top bosses are not feeling the pinch.

At least four members of Centrica's board are multimillionaires. Between them they have grabbed £37 million from their jobs outside Centrica since 2015.

Every trade unionist should support the British Gas workers' fight.

Send solidarity to bit.ly/BGsolidarity

More online

For more on British Gas, go to bit.ly/Gas-strike

DELIVERY STAFF

DHL workers deliver a solid strike in Liverpool over pay and victimisation

by ISABEL RINGROSE

DHL SUPPLY Chain workers in Liverpool struck for 48 hours last week over pay and victimisation.

The Unite union members were set to strike again from Monday to Friday next week and the following Monday and Tuesday.

Solidarity

Unite regional officer Kenny Rowe told Socialist Worker from the picket line last Wednesday, "Solidarity is up despite the freezing rain."

"There are 30 of us



DHL workers on strike last week

PICTURE: UNITE NORTH WEST/TWITTER

picketing on the first shift. There are three shifts a day and we're here for a 24-hour constant presence.

"We need the company to get the message, so of course we've still turned up for a picket."

The 120-strong workforce carries out the delivery contract for Burton Biscuits.

This includes the Wagon Wheel and Jammie Dodger brands, and AB World Foods.

"Management thinks they have a licence to bully," Rowe said.

Strikes began back in December, but further strike days were called

off after DHL promised to make a "significantly improved offer". This offer did not materialise.

Wage

"They put us in a position where workers would receive just 2.5p an hour more than the national minimum wage when it rises in April," Rowe said.

"The talks last time were duplicitous, and I was disgusted with the approach of the company."

"We won't be falling for it again."

"DHL need to remember it's the people they employ who make their profits."

More than 350 DHL

workers at Sainsbury's regional distribution centre in Dartford, Kent, are being balloted for industrial action.

This comes after a Unite steward was suspended for challenging a manger while providing support to a member of staff during a hearing.

Unite believes DHL is "testing the waters during the uncertainty of the pandemic to see if union activity, and the protections it affords staff, can be weakened".

Send messages of support to DHL workers in Liverpool to the Unite regional officer on 07720 703567